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# Charlotte Smith: Political Novelist

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a comprehensive, chronological and synoptic study of political thought in the eleven novels of Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), published between 1788 and 1802. It traces the ways in which Smith incorporates topics which were the subject of political debate in the period immediately following the outbreak of the French Revolution into the framework of the courtship novel, and demonstrates her engagement with what was being said and written by polemicists in response to events in both France and England. By examining each of Smith's novels in relation to a wide range of contemporary political writing, I show that she participated more continuously and closely in the political discourse of the 1790s than has been realised or documented. I also argue that her involvement with political discourse was an important factor in her development as an innovative and experimental novelist. As she questioned and challenged accepted political certainties, and was influenced by politically radical ideas, so her novels became increasingly experimental in form. Even in her pre-Revolutionary novels, Smith expressed dissatisfaction with the socio-political values endorsed by the conventions of courtship novels which commonly resolved with the heroine placed within a patriarchal family, married to a man of rank and living in an inherited landed property. The political battles of the 1790s were fought using topoi of patriarchal authority and patrilineal inheritance, which were seen by conservatives as vital to the preservation of the security and prosperity of the country. At a symbolic level these topoi mirrored the relationship between monarch and subject and the longevity and stability of constitution and state. Smith's political alignment with radical reformers meant that the safe resolutions of her earlier novels were modified or jettisoned as her courtship narratives were inflected by this discourse and became the forums for political debate.



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## Introduction

This thesis is a comprehensive, chronological and synoptic study of political thought as it manifests itself in the eleven novels of Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), published between 1788 and 1802.<sup>1</sup> 'Political thought' during this period is concerned, in its narrower sense, with the power relationships between monarch, parliament and subjects, particularly as these are manifested in the constitution of the state. More widely, it also includes consideration of the ways in which aspects of social organisation, underpinned by law, may oppress or empower individuals or groups. Smith is a 'political' novelist in both senses, incorporating into the framework of the courtship novel 'political' matters which were the subject of impassioned debate in the decade immediately following the outbreak of the French Revolution. By 'courtship novel', I mean that popular genre of sentimental fictional narratives dealing primarily with the adventures of a young heroine during the period prior to her hoped-for marriage to a man of rank and property. This study examines and analyses the ways in which Smith develops and experiments with the courtship novel in response to the conflicting demands of her political radicalism and the conventions of the literary genre she adopts.

In the decade following the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, British political discourse was a ferment of discussion and publication, designated by Marilyn Butler as 'The Revolution Controversy' or 'The Revolution Debate'.<sup>2</sup> Its terms were set primarily by the publication of Edmund Burke's high-profile and conservatively aligned *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and the radical thinker Thomas Paine's

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, gen. ed. Stuart Curran. 14 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005-7). References throughout the thesis are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> See Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

riposte to Burke in the first part of *Rights of Man* (1791). It was conducted across both written and spoken contexts, including books, pamphlets and public meetings and it involved every level of society.<sup>3</sup> Responding to the adoption in France of an egalitarian, rights-based system of government, and the implications if this example were to be followed in Britain, it prompted far-ranging criticism of existing British social, legal and political structures. It also led to the growth of political organisations such as the London Corresponding Society, which agitated for reform, including the extension of voting rights.

The political debate may have been initiated in specifically political pamphlets, but, as Mark Philp has argued, it spilled over into a wide variety of discourses:

At its most narrowly defined, we are concerned with an exchange of pamphlets between Burke and others. At its broadest we are concerned with the full range of literary and discursive forms within which men and women in the 1790s reflected on events in France, and increasingly turned to contemplate the prospect of reform at home -- that is, from the *Prelude* to the broadsheet; from the pulpit to the pub; from the personal diary through the filed reports of Dundas's network of spies.<sup>4</sup>

Anne Mellor has similarly argued that polemic was not the only genre through which writers, particularly female ones, could 'participate fully' in debate and influence public opinion; such genres as drama, poetry, newspapers, conduct books and novels were also utilised.<sup>5</sup>

Of course the novel was viewed with some nervousness by many commentators and was often perceived as an influential and potentially subversive force in the lives of its readers well before the 1790s. Eve Tavor Bannet remarks that because they believed that books had the power to fashion the manners, morals and sentiments of readers,

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<sup>3</sup> For a range of radical and loyalist publications of the 1790s, see *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. by Gregory Claeys, 8 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Philp, 'Introduction', *The French Revolution in British Popular Politics*, ed. by Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 2 and *passim*.

‘eighteenth-century clergymen, conduct book writers and educators either proscribed novel reading altogether or insisted that parents carefully select the novels their daughters read’.<sup>6</sup> James Raven suggests, further, that ‘moral panic about the social consequences of novel reading intensified in times of social and political upheaval’.<sup>7</sup> This was especially true, as Barbara Benedict puts it, ‘in the shadow and the wake of the French Revolution, and the accompanying domestic debate on gender hierarchies and roles’, when the ever-increasing popularity of circulating libraries ‘ignited a reaction close to panic about the intoxicating effects of novels on young women’.<sup>8</sup>

Burke identified the novel as participating in political discourse when he attacked Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s novel, *Julie: ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). In his *Letter to a Member of the General Assembly* (1791), he referred ironically to Rousseau’s ‘famous work of philosophic gallantry’, blaming it for helping to undermine the integrity and security of both family and state.<sup>9</sup> The pervasive influence and centrality of this novel to political discourse has been explored by Nicola Watson, who maintains that ‘revolutionary politics were understood crucially in terms of sentimental fiction -- and in particular the plot of a single novel, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*’.<sup>10</sup>

Awareness on the part of authors of the subversive and corrective power of novels is evidenced by Elizabeth Hamilton when, in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), she has a fictional editor comment on her satirical depiction of Mary Hays (1760-1843), the politically radical intellectual and novelist, in the person of Bridgetina Botherim:

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<sup>6</sup> Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2000), p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, gen. eds. Peter Garside, James Raven & Rainer Schöwerling, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1, ed. by James Raven and Antonia Forster, asst. Stephen Bending, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara M. Benedict, ‘Readers, Writers, Reviewers, and the Professionalization of Literature’, in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. by Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.3-23 (p. 19).

<sup>9</sup> Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. by L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 274.

<sup>10</sup> Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 4.

The ridiculous point of view in which some of the opinions conveyed to the young and unthinking through the medium of philosophical novels, is exhibited in the character of Bridgetina, appears to me as an excellent antidote to the poison.<sup>11</sup>

Further evidence of authorial awareness of the political potential of novels in the 1790s is that despite having produced a polemical work which promoted at length an argument for radical change in women's social and legal status, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft also attempted to portray 'matrimonial despotism' within a novel, the unfinished *Maria or The Wrongs of Women* (posthumously published in 1798).<sup>12</sup> According to her husband William Godwin, in his Preface to this work, she had embarked upon it because she judged its 'purpose and structure' as 'capable of producing an important effect'.<sup>13</sup>

It has long been recognised that Smith's political sympathies leant towards the radical; she was familiar with radical writings and personally acquainted with a number of political radicals. In 1792, Smith wrote to the American radical Joel Barlow (1754-1812), expressing her pleasure at reading his work:

I read with great satisfaction the 'Advice to the Priveleged Orders' and have been, as well as some of my most judicious and reasoning friends here, very highly gratified by the lesser tract, Your Letter to the National Convention. [...] I really pity the advocates for despotism.<sup>14</sup>

As Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokki have noted, Barlow's 'Letter' was to be presented to a meeting of the British Club, a group of radical expatriates in Paris, which was held on 18 November 1792 at White's Hotel. The gathering, at which Tom Paine

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), ed. by Claire Grogan (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), pp. 36-7.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), in *Mary, Maria and Matilda*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> William Godwin, 'Preface' to *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, ed. by Janet Todd, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of 3 November 1792 to Joel Barlow, in *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 48-50.

was present, toasted Smith and Helen Maria Williams as ‘Women of Great Britain’ who had ‘distinguished themselves by their writings in favour of the French Revolution’.<sup>15</sup> Much later in the decade, Smith became the correspondent and the friend of William Godwin (1756-1836), the politically radical philosopher and novelist, meeting him on a number of occasions.

Philp offers a definition of political ‘radicalism’ which, although he develops it in the context of the history of the reform associations, can be applied with equal pertinence to the radicalism of an individual, such as Charlotte Smith, and to its changing manifestations in her novels. He argues that 1790s radicalism was ‘protean’, and that to treat ‘radicalism (or indeed loyalism) as a single, consistent, continuous programme throughout the decade’ is to misunderstand their nature, since both were shaped and conditioned by such influences as ‘government and judicial action against reformers’ and ‘events in France’. Over the decade or so following the outbreak of the Revolution, initial commitments made by radicals towards social and political reform changed considerably and, for the most part, this cannot be attributed to ‘the immanent logic of radical principles’. On the contrary, ‘many of these principles were themselves the outcome of responses to events, or of others’ responses to events’.<sup>16</sup>

I have used the terms ‘radicalism’ and ‘loyalism’ throughout the thesis, with much the same provisos that Philp makes; just as in the world of active political agitation it is inappropriate to look for a single and unchanging stance, such is the case with Smith’s novels, because her radicalism and the expression of it in writing are directly influenced by events and others’ responses to those events. Following the enthusiastic initial response among radicals to the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789, defining events for her and others were the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793

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<sup>15</sup> Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokki, eds., ‘Introduction’, *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), pp. 3-5.

<sup>16</sup> Philp, ‘The Fragmented Ideology of Reform’ in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, pp. 50-77 (p. 56).

and the violence of the Reign of Terror during 1793 and 1794; war with France from 1793 onwards; and the ever-increasing government curtailment of rights of free speech and assembly, which was initiated in May 1792 with the issuing of a royal proclamation against seditious writing, involved the trials for treason of numbers of prominent radicals in 1793 and 1794 and culminated in the swingeing restrictions of the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795.<sup>17</sup> The complexity of Smith's reactions to these events and to the responses of other writers and thinkers does not mean that her later novels are less 'political' or 'radical' than her earlier novels. Rather, it is more apposite to read Smith's novels as a series of reactions and propositions in response to unfolding events and to the responses of other people. In other words, they form an ongoing political conversation.

Despite her familiarity with radical political polemic and its writers, Smith herself was not a political polemicist. Separated from her feckless husband and needing to support, single-handedly, the eight of her children still living at home, in September 1787 Smith turned to writing fiction, specifically courtship novels, a successful literary genre with an established readership.<sup>18</sup> Katherine Sobba Green identifies the central features of the courtship novel as: 'A young woman's entrance into society, the problems arising from that situation, her courtship, and finally her choice (almost always fortunate) among suitors'.<sup>19</sup> Julia Epstein argues that the period of courtship in such novels is 'the period between a young woman's emergence from her father's authority and the subsumption of her identity into that of her husband', the brief moment when the heroine therefore has choice and independent agency, which can set

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<sup>17</sup> For a summary of these events and their impact on political discourse of the period see Claeys, 'Introduction', *Political Writings of the 1790s*, pp. xlv-xlvii.

<sup>18</sup> Letter of 10 February 1788 to an unnamed recipient, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Katherine Sobba Green, *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820: A Feminized Genre* (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1991), p. 2.



the plot in motion.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Edward Copeland notes that the courtship novel usually ends with the retirement of the hero and heroine to ‘a never-never land of an estate in the country’.<sup>21</sup>

Smith was therefore writing within the parameters of a genre in which patriarchal family, marriage and inherited landed property were major topoi. For the adventures of the heroine to take place, plots involved the failure, albeit temporary, of the protection afforded by fathers and husbands, with the workings of the inheritance of landed estates also placed under stress. Thus, the courtship novel characteristically exposed and explored the possible weaknesses of these social institutions, inviting questions about their validity, before the plot resolved with the heroine’s accession to their conventional safety. During the 1790s, the courtship novel became particularly susceptible to political revision since the questioning of patriarchal social structures in what might be termed its characteristic domestic plots, could take on a wider political import. This was because loyalist and radical polemicists frequently utilised the same topoi to defend or attack the status quo. Thus the image of the family, in which the authority of the father or husband was unquestioned, was used to represent the hierarchical, monarchical structure of society; the inherited landed estate, also part of this social order, was used to represent the English constitution. This thesis explores the ways in which Smith exploits the new political potential of the courtship plot to the full, writing novels which appeal to an established taste and readership but which are also part of the political discourse of the 1790s.

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<sup>20</sup> Julia Epstein, ‘Marginality in Frances Burney’s Novels’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 198-209 (p. 199).

<sup>21</sup> Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money: Women’s Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 52.

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Smith's writings, both her poetry and prose fiction, have excited substantial and increasing critical attention in recent years. However, those commentaries which offer a sustained overview of her work have not focused on her political thought, as I do here. Rather, their purpose is typically to give a wider survey of Smith's literary output within a biographical framework. Such studies include that by Florence Hilbish, written in the 1940s, and the more recent critical studies by Loraine Fletcher and Carrol Fry.<sup>22</sup> Although there is some consideration given by these critics to the novels' interaction with some of the major polemical work of the period, particularly Burke's *Reflections* and Paine's *Rights of Man*, none of these scholars provides a detailed analysis of Smith's engagement with the full range of polemical material being produced in the 1790s.

There is a fine body of modern critical material which examines Smith's fiction in the context of the work of those novelists of the period, usually female, who were involved in the unpacking and interrogation of traditional beliefs about marriage and the legal and social status of women. The most frequently studied novelists include, as well as Smith herself, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, Helen Maria Williams, Elizabeth Inchbald, Elizabeth Hamilton, Hannah More and Jane West, although the spectrum of political opinions which their novels offer is categorised or plotted by critics in different ways and using different terminology.<sup>23</sup> For example, M.O. Grenby utilises labels from the period, 'Jacobin' and 'Anti-Jacobin'; Janet Todd

<sup>22</sup> Florence May Anna Hilbish, *Charlotte Smith, Poet and Novelist, 1749-1806* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 1941); Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Carrol L. Fry, *Charlotte Smith* (New York: Twayne, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example: Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution*; M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Anjana Sharma, *The Autobiography of Desire: English Jacobin Women Novelists of the 1790s* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2004); Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1993).

uses the terms 'conservative' and 'radical' as well as 'reactionary' and 'liberal'; and Gary Kelly writes of 'Revolutionary feminist' and 'counter-Revolutionary writers'.<sup>24</sup> Bannet, on the other hand, designates a number of female writers of the period as 'feminists' of the 'Matriarchal' or 'Egalitarian' variety, united in their intentions to challenge political and social orthodoxies but differing in their understanding of a desirable power relationship between men and women.<sup>25</sup> Despite these differences in terminology, however, there is a general agreement among such critics that a large number of women novelists used the genre to question and rethink traditional, patriarchal expectations of the female role and that this was part of political discourse.

This thesis acknowledges, verifies and extends the view of Smith as one novelist among many in the 1790s, who used the courtship novel to undermine or reinforce patriarchal expectations of appropriate female behaviour; that is to say behaviour which deferred to the authority of fathers, husbands and brothers within the family unit, and to the restrictions placed upon women by the laws and social customs of patriarchal society. However, this is not the only way in which Smith's work can be deemed 'political'. In her novels, she refers to, reflects on, responds to, and adds to the kind of political statement which was the meat of radical polemic. There are a number of excellent studies which consider Smith in this light, demonstrating direct relationships between her novels and the politico/historical landscape of the time and identifying her reference to both events and polemical works. However, according to the particular critical standpoint of the study, each is rather selective in its consideration of Smith's novels, rather than surveying her novelistic *oeuvre* as a whole.

Chris Jones, for example, in *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (1993), examines in detail a large number of Smith's novels, although he omits

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<sup>24</sup> Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, *passim*; Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, pp. 225, 210, 232, 209; Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 3, and *passim*.

*Emmeline* (1788), *Ethelinde* (1789), *Montalbert* (1796) and *Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800; 1802).<sup>26</sup> Jones argues that Smith is an exponent of what he terms 'Radical Sensibility', that is to say, of a trust in the ability of innate emotional response to provide the basis of a beneficial social order, combined with a belief in the libertarian principles of the French Revolution. He claims, however, that 'if one looks for a political programme in her writing, one finds only the most rudimentary radicalism, much of it based on liberal attitudes common to other writers of the period'.<sup>27</sup> Adriana Craciun, in *British Women Writers and the French Revolution* (2005), selects from an even narrower range of Smith's work, focusing on *Desmond* (1792), *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1793), *The Old Manor House* (1793) and *The Young Philosopher* (1798) to illustrate what she identifies as a strain of radical 'cosmopolitanism' in the work of female writers of the period.<sup>28</sup> Angela Keane, in *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s* (2000), focuses on the same group of novels, apart from *The Wanderings of Warwick*, to argue that they exemplify the condition of literal and metaphorical exile which characterises some of the radical female writing of the period.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, although the work of Amy Garnai, Harriet Guest and Nancy Johnson each makes connections between events, works of polemic and some of Smith's novels, none of them aims at being comprehensive.<sup>30</sup>

This thesis, therefore, while taking its cue from these studies, aims to be more comprehensive than any of them. As well as treating Smith's entire novelistic *oeuvre*,

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<sup>26</sup> Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993); idem, 'Charlotte Smith as a Radical Novelist', in *Reflections of Revolution: Images of Romanticism*, ed. by Alison Yarrington (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 68-82.

<sup>27</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 161.

<sup>28</sup> Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s; Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Harriet Guest, 'Suspicious Minds: Spies and Surveillance in Charlotte Smith's Novels of the 1790s', in *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740-1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste*, ed. by Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask and David Simpson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 169-87; Nancy Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property and the Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

and thus providing a fuller view of the nature of her political engagement as a novelist, the thesis includes consideration of polemical material which, despite its importance and relevance, has not to date been considered in studies of Smith's political thought and therefore substantially develops and extends further our present knowledge and understanding of her involvement in the radical discourse of her time. For example, I demonstrate for the first time that Smith responds to William Godwin's *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable Practices and Unlawful Assemblies* (1795) as well as to reports, either spoken or written, of formal parliamentary debates prior to the passing of the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795.

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Methodologically, I proceed chronologically through Smith's novels. Each chapter places a novel or novels within the time-specificities of its historical and polemical context and considers the impact of Smith's political reactions to events and polemical writing upon the fiction's linguistic texture and courtship format. I explore the ways in which she echoes in her novels the words and expressions as well as the sentiments of contemporary polemic and political debate. Such linguistic connections are largely lost to modern readers, and have not to date been noted by modern critics, but would have been apparent to her contemporaries.

The first chapter examines together Smith's pre-Revolutionary novels, *Emmeline* (1788) and *Ethelinde* (1789), exploring the tension between Smith's sense of the need for social change and the conventions of the courtship novel with which she has to comply in order to sell her work. It suggests that in these early novels, this tension is manifested in ways which anticipate the novels written by Smith after the

outbreak of the French Revolution, works in which there is an overtly politicised interrogation of traditional power structures. Both *Emmeline* and *Ethelinde* thus usefully provide benchmarks against which to measure Smith's subsequent innovation and experimentation. Chapter 2 concentrates on *Celestina* (1791), investigating the ways in which early events in France and polemical responses to those events, particularly that of Helen Maria Williams in her *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790* (1790), focus Smith's interest in questions of social justice and the distribution of power, played out in her fictional representation of the patriarchal family and the landed estate. Chapter 3 locates *Desmond* (1792) within the polemical pamphlet war which was by this time in full flow. Burke's *Reflections*, Paine's *Rights of Man* and Williams's *Letters* are the major polemical texts addressed in this chapter, echoes of which demonstrate her clear understanding of those politico-philosophical issues which were at the centre of the furore. The novel shows her exuberant and optimistic promotion of politically radical ideas. Chapter 4 on *The Old Manor House* (1793) and *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1793), and Chapter 5 on *The Banished Man* (1794), contextualise these novels within a range of polemical and historical material. These chapters consider how Smith navigates the early attempts of the Pitt administration to restrict criticism of the government, and how her questioning and compassionate intelligence deals with the mismatch between the ideals of the Revolution and their violent manifestations in the Reign of Terror and the Revolutionary Wars which were fought across mainland Europe and in which, from January 1793, England was also involved. Smith's critique of marriage in *Montalbert* (1795) is the dominant focus of my sixth chapter, which uses as touchstones of its radicalism the treatment of marriage in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Chapters 7 and 8, which deal with Smith's final completed novels, *Marchmont* (1796) and *The Young Philosopher* (1798) respectively, concentrate

on Smith's reactions to what radicals perceived as the attempt by an oppressive government to silence free speech through the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795. Radical protest to these Acts was most notably voiced by Godwin and it is with close reference to his *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable Practices and Unlawful Assemblies* (1795), which was written in response to these Acts, that I explore Smith's radical politics. The final chapter of the thesis, which is a study of Smith's unfinished and largely neglected novel, *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800; 1802), also explores the extent of Godwin's influence on Smith's political thought, at a time when for most radicals, hopes for a reformed society had been finally crushed.

To students of Smith's literary *oeuvre*, historians of the novel and students of the political discourse of the 1790s, particularly of the Godwin Circle, this thesis offers new and extensive evidence that Smith was more closely and more continuously involved with radical discourse than has hitherto been demonstrated. In so doing, it changes not only our current understanding of the import of Smith's work, but also our sense of the shapes and languages of radicalism in the period.

## Chapter One

### Challenging Literary Conventions: *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788) and *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789)

'I now believe him capable of any thing' writes Charlotte Smith in 1788 to Thomas Cadell.<sup>31</sup> Smith refers to her insolvent, unfaithful and brutal husband, Benjamin, from whom she had recently separated, at the age of thirty-seven. Writing is the only method by which she can support her eight dependent children and she voices her concern to Cadell, the publisher of her first novel, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle*.<sup>32</sup> She fears that Benjamin will claim any money which the publisher owes her, no idle threat since he has also threatened to sell 'the furniture, the Books and every necessity' which she has in her possession, and which she has 'twice saved from the rapacity of his Creditors'.<sup>33</sup> Smith's situation exemplifies the legal rights of women after marriage, whereby, as Lawrence Stone puts it, 'her person, her property, both real and personal, her earnings and her children all passed on marriage to the absolute control of her husband'.<sup>34</sup>

The circumstances under which Smith starts to write novels thus demonstrate the harsh realities of marriage which are at odds with the literary conventions native to the

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<sup>31</sup> Letter of 14 January 1788 to Thomas Cadell, Snr., in Smith, *Collected Letters*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>32</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 2, ed. by Judith Stanton. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>33</sup> For further details of Benjamin Smith's insolvency, the demands of his creditors and Charlotte Smith's separation from him see Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, pp. 61-87.

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 13.



courtship novel, a tension which is already apparent even in her earliest fiction. For Smith, the personal reality of marriage is emotional distress, financial insecurity and physical threat, against which the law allows her no redress. In her first two novels Smith draws deliberate attention to her own personal life, a technique which she continues to employ in her later fiction. The first edition of *Emmeline* is prefaced by verses addressed to her children, who are the 'dear objects of my tender care', and in which she laments the loss of 'all that Fortune gave'.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in the narrative itself, Smith represents her own disastrous marital history in the inset narratives of Mrs Stafford and Lady Adelina Trelawny. Although, as we shall see, by introducing such personal references she earned criticism from her contemporaries, the introduction of such material helps underscore the glaring discrepancy between the fictitious depiction of marriage and the actual experience of women in the late eighteenth century.

For Smith, her personal experience is symptomatic of the malaise of a society in need of legal and social reform. Society is presented fictionally in her work in ways which draw attention to this need and at this early stage of her novelistic career, she depicts a society ripe for the discontent which is soon to erupt in England in response to the French Revolution, a discourse in which her subsequent novels were to play a part. Although Smith's perception of the failings of society was undoubtedly based in part on the difficulties of her personal life, it would be a serious under-estimation of her intelligence to assume that, even before the political furore which came in the wake of the Revolution she did not also understand and critique their underlying socio-political causes. Although her understanding is not, as yet, expressed in a politically developed way, she draws attention to faults in society and questions the principles which perpetuate them, employing the topoi of the courtship novel -- patriarchal family, marriage and inherited landed property -- to do so.

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<sup>35</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), ed. by Loraine Fletcher (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2003), p. 44.

The contrast between the circumstances of Smith's own marriage and the fictional happiness promised by the marriages of the heroines of her first courtship novels, *Emmeline* and *Ethelinde*, is extreme.<sup>36</sup> In these early novels, Smith works within the conventions of the genre, in which, typically, marriage is not presented as the cause of, but rather the solution to, the problems of a young heroine, bringing emotional fulfilment and financial security within the protection of a patriarchal family, after a period adrift and unprotected in the outside world. Marriage is the prize for the heroine who, during the course of her adventures, has ultimately proved her worthiness for this reward. She is installed within a noble house with its estate, itself a potent symbol, firstly, of the physical safety and financial security which the marriage brings and secondly, of the continuation of a stable society, passed down, together with the social power of its owners, through the generations.

Frances Burney's *Evelina or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), one of the most important and influential novels of the period, resolves in such a way. In the final letter of this epistolary narrative, Burney ensures the heroine's integration into traditional society when Evelina writes to her guardian and surrogate father, the Reverend Arthur Villars:

All is over, my dearest Sir, and the fate of your Evelina is decided! This morning, with fearful joy, and trembling gratitude, she united herself forever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection!

I have time for no more; the chaise now waits which is to conduct me to dear Berry Hill, and to the arms of the best of men.<sup>37</sup>

At this point, Evelina is subsumed into the system, swept into the patriarchal safety of marriage and landed estate. Now married to the high-ranking Lord Orville, she

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<sup>36</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 3, ed. by Stuart Curran. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>37</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, The History of a Young Lady's First Entrance into the World* (1778), ed. by Edward A. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2002), p. 406. (The original title of this work does not include the phrase, '*The History of*', which was added to later editions.)

expresses gratitude for this marriage, which is the determinant of her future happiness. She also defers to the benign patriarchal governance of Villars and is about to return to his landed property. Ultimately, the reader has previously learned, she will go to Lincolnshire, 'to one of his Lordship's [Orville's] country seats'.<sup>38</sup>

This conventional and comfortable resolution seems to have accounted in part for *Evelina's* favourable contemporary critical reception. *The Critical Review*, for example, suggests that 'the father of a family' will 'recommend it to his daughters' who will 'laugh and grow wiser as they read' and that even the sons of the family will be led to 'improvement and to virtue' by reading *Evelina's* story.<sup>39</sup> The underlying implication is that *Evelina's* marriage to a high-ranking man of property and her respect for patriarchal authority endorses the existing social order which the reviewer is keen to support.

However, it can be argued that courtship novels had, because of the nature of their plot structures, the capacity to question and undermine traditional certainties, a capacity of which writers were aware and which they were able to exploit. Courtship novels depended upon the temporary breakdowns of patriarchal society to enable the heroine to move unprotected within the dangers of the world and to test herself against its temptations. This was ostensibly a way of demonstrating the heroine's readiness for the reward of marriage to a man of rank and property. However, this interim period, which made up the body of the novel and which contained what Julia Epstein has termed the 'dark moments' of the courtship tradition, offered opportunities for the unsettling of patriarchal certainties and the exposure of their weaknesses.<sup>40</sup> The ways in which Burney, in particular, exploits the contradictions and tension inherent in the genre, including the versions of marital happiness and patriarchal protection attained by

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 377-9.

<sup>39</sup> *The Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature*, 46 (September, 1778), pp. 202-4.

<sup>40</sup> Epstein, 'Marginality in Frances Burney's Novels', p. 199.

the heroine in the resolution, and the contrasted representations of marriage and fathers during the period of her adventures in the world, have been examined by Kristina Straub. Writing about *Evelina*, she argues that the novel's 'fairy-tale resolution turns female decline into fulfilment', but that Burney's novel also acknowledges 'the social realities her fairy-tale denies' by presenting contrasted and co-existing versions of female experience of patriarchal society. For example, 'Marriage delivers Evelina from unhappiness, but it also determines a life of powerlessness and discomfort for the deserving Mrs Mirvan'; this pessimistic view of marriage in the novel as a whole is in 'unresolved and [...] significant contradiction to the novel's conventional ending'.<sup>41</sup> The novel includes, moreover, the tragic marital history of Evelina's mother, Caroline, and although such marriages are on the periphery of the action, with the main thrust of the narrative towards the marriage of Evelina to the suitor of highest rank and virtue, they shadow and moderate the representation of marriage as the acme of female fulfilment.

Similarly, the novel's resolution celebrates patriarchy in the shape of Evelina's return to the house of her surrogate father, and her impending arrival at her husband's; however, despite the tardy conversion of her libertine father Sir John Belmont into a contrite man of sensibility, the failures of patriarchy in the body of the narrative prompt questions about the way in which it functions in real life as the mainstay of female security. If the protector fails to protect, then wives and daughters who have been taught to rely upon such protection are at risk of ruination. Villars, it is true, does function as a partial counter-balance to the deeply flawed Sir John Belmont, but his high-principled, loving, but nervous and unworldly style of fatherhood is not sufficient to prevent the

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<sup>41</sup> Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1987), pp. 20, 55. For further important commentaries on Burney's treatment of the genre see: Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

elopement of Evelina's mother in one generation or to bring Evelina through the minefield of polite society and the dangers of the wider world in the second. Ultimately it is Evelina herself who decides, upon the basis of her own moral judgement, that Orville is an appropriate husband, in the face of Villars' admonition that 'his society is death to your future tranquillity!'<sup>42</sup> Thus the restoration of the values of patriarchy in the resolution of the novel is persistently shadowed with the possibility of fragmentation and dissolution, both in the story of Evelina herself and in the narratives of marital disaster and the failures of fatherly protection which surround her.

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Smith draws attention to the relationship of her own work to the courtship tradition, and particularly to the novels of Burney, reminding the reader of her predecessor's work in a scene in *Emmeline* in which *Cecilia*, Burney's second novel, is read aloud to the heroine, Emmeline Mowbray, and her friend Mrs Stafford:

A stormy morning had driven Delamere from the fields; who went into Mrs. Stafford's dressing-room, where he found Fitz-Edward reading *Cecilia* to Mrs. Stafford and Miss Mowbray while they sat at work (p. 172).

Smith is acutely aware of the relationship between her own novels and the genre as a whole and the reference to *Cecilia* in this novel is the first example of her employment of a technique which is also evident in her later work, whereby she reminds her readers that she is writing within the traditions of a genre with its own precedents and conventions. On a number of occasions, Smith draws attention in her novels to their fictional nature, using this technique as a way of implying that their depiction of a world of courtship, happy marriage and benign patriarchal protection is no more than an

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<sup>42</sup> Burney, *Evelina*, pp. 347, 309.

illusion, a constructed and artificial world, out of kilter with the actualities of the status quo with which she is at odds.

There is also an invitation to the reader in this particular instance to make direct connections between *Emmeline* and *Cecilia*, the latter a work which would be familiar to many readers of the former; as Judy Simmons argues, '*Cecilia* was an enormously influential book in its day, widely read and widely copied'.<sup>43</sup> The reference to *Cecilia* is, at the plot level, a reminder of a similarity between the situation of Burney's heroine, whose marriage was opposed by her husband's family on the grounds of rank, and that of Smith's heroine. Emmeline, orphaned and ostensibly illegitimate, is the object, albeit the unwilling one, of the affections of Delamere, whose high-ranking parents are determined to crush his infatuation. This reminder of Burney's treatment of the courtship novel marriage plot has been noted by modern critics. Citing as proof the fact that, unlike Cecilia, Emmeline 'does not marry into the aristocratic family who despise her', Fletcher suggests that Smith can 'more sharply distinguish between Burney's reluctant resignation to the hierarchies of class and gender and her own increasingly feminist and anti-aristocratic politics'.<sup>44</sup> Eve Tavor Bannet claims that in some respects *Emmeline* can be read as a 'dialogical response' to *Cecilia* and argues that unlike Burney, Smith uses her female characters to help one another so that the shortcomings of patriarchal society are counter-balanced and their bond of friendship 'all but replaces family ties'.<sup>45</sup> Fletcher and Bannet do not, however, note that Smith also includes a significant, if brief reminder of the plot of *Cecilia* in the opening of the novel; Lord Montreville, Emmeline's uncle, had married Lady Eleonore Delamere, a 'sole heiress', taking her name and later gaining a title after the death of her father. Unlike Cecilia, Lady Eleonore is able to bring an ancient family name to her marriage, as well as

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<sup>43</sup> Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), intro. by Judy Simmons (London: Virago Press, 1986), p. xii.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, ed. by Fletcher, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution*, pp. 78-9.

fortune. Both *Cecilia* and *Emmeline* raise questions about inheritance and the powers enjoyed by those born into the higher ranks of a patriarchal and hierarchical society. However, Smith develops these issues further, presenting a more concerted interrogation of the status quo in the main body of the narrative, in ways which anticipate the political thrust of her novels of the 1790s.

The patrilineal transmission of property is the main locus of this interrogation in Smith's novel, whose full title is *Emmeline, or the Orphan of the Castle*. The orphan in question is the heroine, Emmeline herself, and the castle of the title is the ancient Mowbray Castle, in which she is living at the beginning of the novel. Although she is exiled from it for most of the narrative, ultimately Emmeline is revealed as the castle's legitimate owner and returns there in the final chapter of the novel, together with her husband William Godolphin. The resolution endorses traditional values, for Emmeline enjoys the quiet pleasures of an inherited property, with a husband who is 'the tenderest of husbands, the best, the most generous and most amiable of men' (p. 468).

Accession to a landed property as an ending to a courtship novel is rooted in a rhetoric of civic humanist virtue, which, as J.G.A. Pocock and John Barrell have demonstrated, was a dominant ideology in the eighteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Locating the origins of the tradition in classical and Renaissance Republican thought, Pocock claims that within it 'land and inheritance remained essential to virtue', a defence against society's potential corruption from mercantile interests and financial speculation. The tradition held that the landed man had the leisure and autonomy to consider what was to others' good as well as his own, whereas 'the individual engaged in exchange could discern only particular values -- that of the commodity which was his, that of the commodity for

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<sup>46</sup> For further examination of the rhetoric of civic humanist virtue, see: J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730-1780: An Equal Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983).

which he exchanged it'.<sup>47</sup> Thus the conventional retreat to an inherited landed estate by the virtuous fictional protagonist can be read as an affirmation of the status quo.

However, although the resolution of *Emmeline* appears to reinforce this ideology, the main body of the narrative unsettles it. As well as using the image of Mowbray Castle to reinforce social stability and continuity in the resolution of the narrative, Smith uses it also as a locus for the questioning of a dominant ideology in the story of the struggle for its ownership between Emmeline and her uncle, Lord Montreville. As the narrative progresses, there is an increasing sense that this story of rightful inheritance and virtue has a politically inflected sub-text, since Smith chooses an ancient, gothic castle as the contested property rather than simply a noble house and landed estate. As Fletcher claims, 'the castle may be read metaphorically as the constitution, which needs change and new leaders', and suggests that Smith is influenced by William Cowper's use of the trope in his poem *The Task* (1784).<sup>48</sup> However, the image of the Gothic castle was already rich in fictional, political and polemical connotations, well known and flexibly used in a derogatory, approving or ambiguous way according to the viewpoint and purpose of the user. Markman Ellis has drawn attention to some of the ways in which the image was used by political writers and polemicists: for example, the Gothic castle could equally represent a barbarous past from which England had been liberated, or be used as a symbol of the ancient origins of the constitution, a constitution which had endured, and which, when refined for modern times, had reached its present enviable state.<sup>49</sup> This last was a trope with political resonance long before Burke's *Reflections* and the polemical battles of the 1790s.<sup>50</sup> It was most notably used by William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of*

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<sup>47</sup> Pocock, pp. 463-4.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Emmeline*, ed. by Fletcher, pp. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Markman Ellis, *The History of the Gothic Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 24-7.

<sup>50</sup> For a further examination of the image of the Gothic castle in literary works of the late eighteenth-century, see David Punter, *Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 29-30.



*England* (1765–69), in which he describes English Common Law in terms of a castle:

‘We inherit an old Gothic castle, erected in the days of chivalry, but fitted up for a modern inhabitant’.<sup>51</sup>

Smith is able to use the struggle for the ownership of Mowbray Castle to interrogate and potentially undermine traditional beliefs that the right to legal and social power should be an inherited one, vested in a small section of the population, and to ask who should wield that power in the future. The opening paragraph of the novel, which describes the castle, is already verging on allegory, carrying the socio-political inflections which help carry Smith’s complex interrogation of traditional society:

In a remote part of the county of Pembroke, is an old building, formerly of great strength, and inhabited for centuries by the ancient family of Mowbray; to the sole remaining branch of which it still belonged, tho’ it was, at the time this history commences, inhabited only by servants; and the greater part of it was gone to decay. A few rooms only had been occasionally repaired to accommodate the proprietor, when he found it necessary to come thither to receive his rents, or to inspect the condition of the estate; which however happened so seldom, that during the twelve years he had been master of it, he had only visited the castle for a few days. [...] An old housekeeper, a servant who waited on her, the steward, and a labourer who was kept to look after his horse and work in that part of the garden which yet bore the vestige of cultivation, were now all its inhabitants; except a little girl, of whom the housekeeper had the care, and who was believed to be the natural daughter of that elder brother, by whose death Lord Montreville, the present possessor, became entitled to the estate. (p. 3)

At the simplest level, there is an implied criticism of the way in which the owner Lord Montreville fulfils his responsibilities to look after the estate, and a hint that the ownership of the castle might be disputed. At a deeper level, there is the sense that the castle represents a society in need of change, which cannot be accomplished by the perpetuation of existing patrilineal power structures. These ingredients are central to the plot of the novel, which traces the story of the restoration of the castle and the estate to

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<sup>51</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765–69), vol. III, p. 268.

their legal owner, Emmeline, who, by the end of the novel, has also earned the right to the property by virtue. The castle is as much the reward for her virtuous conduct as is the marriage to the man of her choice.

The opening description of Mowbray Castle, whose origins are in the feudal past, has some affinity with that imaged by Blackstone. However, rather than being also suitable for 'a modern inhabitant', Mowbray Castle is in a state of decay and dereliction, suggestive of a tradition in decline and needing change. A second description, which accompanies Emmeline's forced departure from the castle, reinforces this impression. She is forced to leave the castle early in the narrative following the death of two loyal retainers who had cared for her, because of the unwelcome attentions of a new steward, Maloney, and her uncle Montreville's volatile son, Delamere. Montreville wishes to prevent his son from forming an attachment and Emmeline, equally desirous of avoiding Delamere and yet unwilling to marry Maloney, as Montreville demands, has no choice but to leave. As she leaves, Emmeline looks back at the castle:

Its venerable towers rising above the wood in which it was almost embosomed, made it one of the most magnificent features of a landscape which now appeared in sight.

The road lay along the side of what would in England be called a mountain; at its feet rolled the rapid stream that washed the castle walls, foaming over fragments of rock; and bounded by a wood of oak and pine; among which the ruins of the monastery, once an appendage to the castle, reared its broken arches; and marked by grey and mouldering walls, and mounds covered with slight vegetation, it was traced to its connection with the castle itself, still frowning in gothic magnificence; and stretching over several acres of ground; the citadel, which was totally in ruins and covered with ivy, crowning the whole. (pp. 35-6)

These images of past glory and power and of more recent dereliction and decay are a reminder that the laws of inheritance by primogeniture have apparently led to Mowbray's decline over many generations, not only during the period of Montreville's ownership. The decline of Mowbray is not simply the result of the neglect of one illegal owner, but the manifestation of an out-dated system which has failed. The Gothic castle

needs further work if it is to be maintained for what Blackstone calls a 'modern inhabitant'. Change is needed; that change is represented by the return of Emmeline, as if virtue might one day come to inherit England.

Emmeline's claim to the castle is made good only after the details of her childhood are revealed. She had spent her infancy in France, where she had allegedly been born out of wedlock. Her father, the heir to Mowbray, had died in Italy and after her mother's death, the young orphan had been sent to live at the castle under the care of his old nurse, where she had remained until she turned sixteen. Ultimately it is revealed that since her parents had been married and the estate willed to her by her father, she is the legal owner of the castle (p. 323). This lip-service to the rules of inheritance is the only way in which the castle can legally pass to the ownership of Emmeline. However, Smith ensures that this does not come to pass until the heroine has endured a long period of suffering, during which she has been marginalised and impoverished and has acted in ways which entitle her to inherit the castle because of her moral superiority rather than legal right. Lord Montreville, who is ideally situated for the role of a Villars-like surrogate father, displays no paternal concern and it is this breakdown of patriarchal protection that ensures Emmeline's suffering and the testing of her worth.

Throughout the novel, this testing is conducted in the context of the question of whether she should and will return to Mowbray Castle, rather than whether she is fit for marriage to a man of rank. Emmeline holds the castle in her mind's eye as a haven during her progress through a series of locations, including the Isle of Wight, France and Switzerland, moving between social gatherings, rural solitude, wealth and comparative poverty until she is finally returned to Mowbray in the geographically full-circle resolution. Twice during her long period of separation from the place, when she is beset by what seem to be irresolvable problems, Emmeline refers to Mowbray as the ultimate sanctuary, more likely to bring her happiness than either marriage or wealth.

Godolphin's brother, Lord Westhaven, is helping Emmeline with her legal claim to Mowbray. He is also, however, brother-in-law to her persistent suitor Delamere and suggests to her that she might consider the latter's belated offer of marriage. Emmeline responds, 'It is my fixed intention, if I obtain, by your Lordship's generous interposition, the Mowbray estate, to retire to Mowbray Castle, and never to marry at all' (p. 360). Later, involved in further legal struggles to wrest the estate from Montreville, she longs 'for the beautiful and interesting landscape which she remembered to have enjoyed in Autumn at Mowbray Castle, where she so much languished to be' and 'sometimes thought, if her uncle would resign it and the estate immediately around to her, she could be content to leave him in possession of the rest of the fortune he coveted with so much avidity' (p. 393).

Emmeline's earning of the right to Mowbray through personal merit contrasts with the claim of Lord Montreville and his son, whom Smith shows as unfit to be the owners of the estate. Montreville, despite his noble antecedents, is castigated, not simply because of his lack of concern for the estate but on grounds of personal ethics. 'Avarice and ambition' are identified as two qualities which motivate his behaviour, exemplified by his attempts to marry Emmeline off to Maloney and thus prevent his son forming 'an attachment prejudicial to his ambitious views'. Although he has some qualms about marrying 'a creature boasting a portion of the Mowbray blood' to a man of inferior birth, he is persuaded by the fact that 'Maloney would be happy to take her with a few hundred pounds' (pp. 20-1).

His heir, Delamere, although in some ways a not unattractive or unsympathetic figure, is also presented as undeserving of Mowbray Castle. Viewing the place in arrogant fashion, he designates Emmeline as an item of property, remarking, 'I begin to see great capabilities about this venerable mansion', adding that he supposes 'Miss Emmeline is to be included in the inventory' (p. 19). Implied criticism of such

assumptions about women as owned and negotiable property, here used as a stick with which to beat both Montreville and his son, is a reminder of the status which Emmeline shares with many other marriageable females in both courtship fiction and the real life of the late eighteenth-century. It is pleasingly ironic that Emmeline, represented thus as a property owned by men, is ultimately acknowledged as the rightful owner of a property illegally appropriated by a man.

If *Emmeline* unsettles the fictions of primogeniture, it also unsettles conventional portrayals of marriage, for alongside the progress of the heroine to her marriage with the virtuous Godolphin there is a sustained look at two dysfunctional marriages. The part played by these portraits in the development of Smith's critique of the limited role of women in society, the injustice of their legal entitlements and the denial of their emotional and sexual needs has been thoroughly examined by Eleanor Ty in her study of how five female writers of the 1790s 'politicised the domestic or sentimental novel'.<sup>52</sup> Ty provides an insightful analysis of Smith's use of the 'contradictory narratives' of Mrs Stafford and Lady Adelina Trelawny, although unlike this chapter, which highlights the ideological implications of the inheritance plot, Ty's commentary uses Smith's critique of marriage and patriarchal expectations of female behaviour as the measure of her attacks upon traditional values.

The Stafford and Trelawny marriages prove the unhappy sequel to courtship rather than its happy resolution and are given considerable attention, far beyond the more muted presence of, for example, the unhappy Mirvan marriage in *Evelina*. Smith's depiction of the Stafford marriage presents Mr Stafford as feckless and irresponsible, while Mrs Stafford is long-suffering, intelligent, and the sole support of her four children. Mrs Stafford's problems are that she married very young and has been brought to the point of ruin by her feckless and selfish husband. She is eventually forced to go to

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<sup>52</sup> Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, pp.115-29.

France with him until she is able to arrange for his debts to be settled, as the only alternative to following him into debtors' prison. In despair she cries out, 'Others have, in their husbands, protectors and friends; mine, not only throws upon me the burthen of affairs which he has himself embroiled, but adds to their weight by cruelty and oppression' (p. 408). The justifications for marriage on the usual grounds of female dependency on male physical and financial protection are inverted, with Mrs Stafford becoming the protector of her husband as well as of her children. The implications of her story, that marriage does not necessarily bring protection, that marriage can waste a woman's intellectual gifts, and that marriage can destroy her health and emotional well-being, are obvious. The fictional escape provided for Mrs Stafford is the convenient shipping of her husband to the West Indies to 'a lucrative employment' arranged by Lord Westhaven (p. 450). She ends the novel with her financial problems resolved, living happily with her children, but apart from her husband. Part of her time will be spent at Woodfield, the house which her husband had nearly lost, and part at Mowbray Castle where she is part of the Godolphin circle of family and 'charming friends' (p. 467).

Lady Adelina Trelawny, the younger of Godolphin's two sisters, is also presented as the victim of marriage. When Emmeline and Mrs Stafford first meet her she is separated from her husband, Trelawny, and pregnant by Fitz-Edward, the libertine friend of Delamere. She is living very privately in a 'cottage', ashamed of her 'fallen' status and concerned to keep the pregnancy secret from everyone who knows her, including her former lover (pp. 183-202). Her story, like that of Mrs Stafford, is a combination of unwise early marriage and a husband who is unworthy of his wife. In Adelina's case, she had married at fifteen, which she describes as 'just out of the nursery', to avoid living with her father and his new wife, whom she dislikes (p. 191). Trelawny soon loses interest in her and spends much of his time abroad, gaming and

drinking so that Adelina has neither a friend nor a companion and ‘not even a protector’ (p. 195). Adelina’s subsequent involvement with Fitz-Edward is the result of her unhappiness and loneliness, coupled with his predatory admiration for her. When her husband is made bankrupt and loses the house in which she has been living, Fitz-Edward persuades her to put herself under his protection with the result that they become lovers and Adelina is made pregnant. The attitude which Smith has Emmeline and Mrs Stafford take towards Adelina, one of emotional and physical support, is a rejection of the notion of the ‘fallen’ woman. Instead of allotting blame and punishment to Adelina, Smith engineers a convenient fictional solution to her problem, with the death of Trelawny at the age of twenty-five, leaving her free to marry the now contrite Fitz-Edward if she wishes.

The parallels to Smith’s personal life were picked up by contemporary readers, with the anonymous writer in *The Critical Review* noting chastisingly that, ‘in one or two instances, she seems to have aimed at persons. We hope that she has not looked at home, in the misfortunes of Mrs Stafford’.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the story of Adelina’s marriage at fifteen to a worthless young man of lower social standing to escape an unpleasant step-mother also mirrors Smith’s experience. Possibly Smith was attempting in this way to drum up sympathy and support for her battles with her husband and for her life-long struggle to obtain the income for her children left by her father-in-law in his contested will.<sup>54</sup> However, the inclusion of such parallels also reinforces the critique of marriage as an institution, through the implication that troubles of the kind endured by Mrs Stafford and Lady Adelina are not unlikely imaginings peculiar to fiction. Certainly the inclusion of these characters drew attention to the problems and dilemmas of women trapped in unhappy marriages. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft commented

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<sup>53</sup> *The Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature*, 65 (June, 1788), p. 531.

<sup>54</sup> For details of Smith’s legal struggles to obtain the income for her children willed by Richard Smith, see Smith, *Collected Letters*, ed. by Stanton, pp. xxxvii-xxix.

(anonymously) in *The Analytical Review* on the behaviour of both women: 'Lady Adelina is indeed a character as absurd as dangerous. [...] Mrs Stafford, when disappointed in her husband, turned to her children. We mention this character because it deserves praise.'<sup>55</sup>

Smith is not, of course, writing a polemic against all marriage or presenting a blanket dismissal of the institution. She provides a glimpse of a mutually loving relationship when Adelina compares her own marriage to that of her older sister Camilla and her husband Lord Clancarryl, admiring his 'tender attention to his wife; his ardent, yet regulated fondness for his children; the peace and order which reigned in his house' (p. 195). However, in her narratives of unhappy marriage, Smith's interrogation of the institution highlights its weaknesses and the fictional endings belie the situation of women unhappily married in real life, forced by law and social pressure to endure whatever unhappiness their marriages brought.

In this novel, Smith is already using the conventional topoi of the courtship novel, patriarchal family, marriage and inherited landed estate to question the status quo. She exposes weaknesses in the claims made by traditionalists for marriage and patriarchal protection, developing in this way a critique which will later bring her into alignment with the politico-feminist discourse of the 1790s. Her treatment of the inheritance plot, which is a dominant feature of this novel, questions the notion that the inheritors of landed property deserve and should continue to exert that power. To question the premise that the passing down of landed estates through the generations automatically benefits the estates themselves and is essential to the stability of the country as a whole is to take issue with a dominant political ideology of the eighteenth-century. The premise, soon to be defined by Burke as 'the power of perpetuating our

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<sup>55</sup> Anonymous [Mary Wollstonecraft], *The Analytical Review; or History of Literature* (July, 1788), p. 333.



property in our families' which 'tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself', would become a major point of contention in the polemical battles of the 1790s.<sup>56</sup>

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Smith's second novel, *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* (1789), begins, like *Emmeline*, with a description of an old landed estate:

On the borders of the small but beautiful lake called Grasmere Water, in the county of Cumberland, is Grasmere Abbey, an old seat belonging to the family of Newenden. The abbey, founded by Ranulph Earl of Chester, for forty Cistercian monks, was among those dissolved by Henry the Eighth; by whom it was given, with its extensive royalties, to the family of Brandon; from whence it descended by a female to Sir Edward Newenden, its present possessor.

His father, a man of boundless profusion, had at his death left every part of his property mortgaged: but Sir Edward, on succeeding to it, had married the heiress of Mr. Maltravers (a gentleman who had acquired an immense fortune in the East Indies); and he had retrieved the fortune of his house, and disembarrassed his estates, by this opulent alliance.

Though much attached to Grasmere Abbey, which he venerated as the abode of his ancestors, and loved as the scene of his early pleasures, Sir Edward had not seen it for above four years. Lady Newenden had never been farther from the metropolis than to some of those places of public resort where all its conveniences and amusements are to be enjoyed (p. 6).

Because of the initial similarity in narrative pattern, it seems for the moment that the ancient noble house and estate will function in the same way as in *Emmeline*. However, Smith makes innovative changes, confounding such expectations in two ways. Firstly, the landed property of Grasmere never becomes, like Mowbray, the subject of disputed inheritance. Secondly, it is not the place to which the heroine is removed in the courtship resolution; instead, Ethelinde's marital home is a 'cottage' on the shores of Grasmere Water. She will remain here with her nobly-descended but financially

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<sup>56</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 51.

modestly-placed husband, Charles Montgomery, and his refined and sensitive mother (pp. 506-7). Ethelinde's marriage is in line with courtship novel convention, but the removal to a 'cottage' is not, since Smith rejects, on behalf of her heroine, accession to a landed property. This rejection is part and parcel of her attack in the novel as a whole on the corruption of a society based on the ruthless acquisition of wealth. The landed property, as it is presented in this novel, far from being the locus of gentlemanly virtue and a symbol of the England which needs to be preserved, is itself corrupted and representative of an England which is in need of reform. It is therefore appropriate that the acquisition of Grasmere Abbey does not resolve the courtship plot.

This corruption is flagged up in the opening account of the recent financial history of Grasmere Abbey, starting with the role of Sir Edward Newenden's profligate father and continuing with a history of money ruthlessly acquired through trade and slavery. It was through his marriage to the daughter of Mr Maltravers, a man who had made money in the East Indies, that Sir Edward resolved his financial problems. Stuart Curran claims in the introduction to his recent edition of the novel that the Maltravers fortune was made in the West Indies (p. ix). However, Smith actually specifies the East Indies; and later in the novel, Montgomery takes up a post in the East Indies as a way of making sufficient money to marry Ethelinde. In this way, Smith distinguishes her virtuous hero from the corrupt history of the Abbey, for once in the East Indies, he writes to say that although his situation there would be 'extremely lucrative to some other man', he had been obliged to leave it and move to a distant settlement and presumably less well-paid post because 'he had found it so impossible with his principles and feelings to fill it' (p. 448). Montgomery's moral stance at this point is an additional way in which Smith undermines the claim that the landed estates of England are a bastion against corruption from mercantile and financial interests, and that their legal and social power base should therefore remain unquestioned.

Ethelinde Chesterville's connections to Grasmere Abbey are initiated in the opening chapters when she is asked to stay there by her cousin, Maria Newenden, along with other house guests. Maria, the wife of Sir Edward, is resident under protest, regarding its location in Cumberland as a 'desart' and longing for the 'conveniences and amusements' of the metropolis (p. 5). In contrast Ethelinde and Sir Edward share an appreciation of the sublime scenery which surrounds the Abbey and a sensibility which distinguishes them from the coarse vulgarity of those individuals who provide most of the trials which beset the protagonists. The Abbey is seen through Ethelinde's eyes as a component of the beauty of the scenery:

Their road became now more slow by the necessity of winding among the hills; and every mile presented some new beauty, affording to Ethelinde the purest and most exquisite delight. At length they came within view of Grasmere Water, and passing between two enormous fells -- one of which descended, clothed with wood, almost perpendicularly to the lake; while the other hung over it, in bold masses of staring rock -- they turned round a sharp point formed by the root of the latter; and entering a lawn, the abbey, embosomed among the hills, and half concealed by old elms which seemed coeval with the building, appeared with its gothic windows, and long pointed roof of a pale grey stone, bearing everywhere the marks of great antiquity. (p. 16)

Ethelinde lives here for part of the novel, not literally as a recluse, but in quiet seclusion. She leaves it with reluctance for the venal wider world, and it is important that her ultimate return is to the unsullied beauty of the Abbey's environs, rather than to the Abbey itself. The cottage by Grasmere Water represents a retreat from an image of corrupted landed power into the sanctuary of natural and picturesque surroundings.

Ironically, however, in the resolution of the novel, Ethelinde and Montgomery need money to live in their virtuous idyll and receive this from Montgomery's lately discovered half-uncle, Mr Harcourt, whose wealth has been generated in Jamaica. Smith attempts to distance the couple from the taint of such money by showing that despite this, their circumstances are modest, untainted by mercenary values and that they

‘covet’ not money or material goods, but the ‘dear tho’ humble abode’ where they have found happiness (p. 506).

Although Ethelinde and Montgomery do not inherit Grasmere Abbey, Smith supplies what might be seen as a deferred courtship resolution and holds out a possible reconnection of marriage to ancient property. At the end of the novel Grasmere Abbey remains the property of the now widowed Sir Edward Newenden. Depicted throughout as a deserving man of sensibility, he had, in the course of the novel, fallen in love with Ethelinde, given large amounts of money to help her father and brother, and eventually proposed marriage himself. He now devotes himself to ‘the duty he owed his country, and the education of his children’; his reward is the lessening of ‘the painful sensations’ which accompanied his love for Ethelinde, and the hope that his eldest son would one day become the husband of Ethelinde’s daughter by her husband Charles Montgomery (pp. 506-7). Such a marriage might redeem the Abbey in the unspecified future.

Smith’s sustained critique of the greedy pursuit of wealth and the corrupting power of money affects her representation not only of property, but also of patriarchal family and marriage. In *Ethelinde*, the patriarchal family has broken down. Ethelinde is a young, virtuous female of good birth whose mother has died and whose father, Colonel Chesterville, albeit a loving parent, brings the family to the point of financial ruin by ‘playing monstrous deep’(p. 9). The situation is exacerbated by the dissipation of her only sibling, her brother Harry, who is ultimately brought to the debtors’ prison (p. 193). Ethelinde’s role in the patriarchal family reverses traditional expectations, in that she is the main support of both father and brother, not only emotionally but physically, attempting to pay debts, for example, by selling her jewellery (p. 87).

Obedience to fathers and willingness to undertake marriage which will financially benefit the family are further questioned in this novel even as both Ethelinde and Montgomery show respect for these values. For example, when Montgomery tells

Colonel Chesterville of his love for Ethelinde, a major reason he cites for his love is the undeserved consideration she gives to her father and brother:

The beauty of Ethelinde was, however interesting and captivating, forgotten in contemplating the sweetness of her disposition, and the tenderness of her heart. Her attention to her father, her anxiety for her brother, the fortitude which she assumed in the hope of alleviating the wretchedness of the one, and the sacrifices she was prepared to make to relieve the pecuniary distresses of the other, were such proofs of genuine goodness and greatness of soul, that Montgomery, who was all spirit and generosity, must have loved such qualities wherever he had met them. (p. 191)

On the other hand, the financial state of the Chesterville family, with both male 'protectors' contributing to its financial ruin, means that Ethelinde's father cannot consent to her marriage to Montgomery and so she sees her duty as clear:

He lamented that one fatal and apparently insurmountable object would make it impossible for him to give his daughter to the man, who, had he possessed only a competence for her support, he would have preferred to the most splendid fortune, and the most elevated connections.

The heart of Ethelinde had long been irrevocably Montgomery's; but too well persuaded that it was impossible she could ever be his wife, she endeavoured [...] to dedicate her life to the service of her father and her brother, and her heart to Montgomery; never to marry, since death would be preferable to a union with any other man; but to content herself with loving him and seeing him happy, which she was well persuaded he might be, if he could [...] address some woman of great fortune, and by that means procure an establishment equal to his birth. (pp. 191-2)

Smith places the acceptance of the moral duty to respect and adhere to patriarchal authority, which is displayed by Ethelinde and Montgomery, in ironic contrast to the financial considerations which actually determine their fates. Thus the virtuous Ethelinde hopes that the man she loves might marry a rich woman, a disturbing logic echoed by Sir Edward, who is in love with Ethelinde but advises her to consider an offer of marriage from Mr Davenant, his wealthy and worthless young ward. 'What right have I to obstruct a marriage which would secure her affluence?' he asks himself in

anguish, knowing that there will never be any financial support from her father or brother (p. 41). The lives of the protagonists are thus pervaded by the corrupting power of the greed for money and Smith invites the conclusions that patriarchal social codes which claimed to be based on moral considerations are actually driven by financial ones.

Both *Emmeline* and *Ethelinde* interrogate and undermine unquestioning adherence to a set of assumptions about marriage, patriarchal families and inheritance, all of which would soon be central to political debate. In both novels Smith uses the conventions of the courtship novel, with the potential they offer for the questioning of the patriarchal and hierarchical society which they represent, to express her profound dissatisfaction with this society, whilst paying lip-service to the values they endorse. She is able to show that patriarchal family protection is fallible and flawed; that for women marriage does not necessarily bring happiness and security; and, most importantly in these early novels, that the ownership of property should not be dependent upon rank or wealth, but upon merit. The narrative of the successful negotiation by the poor and vulnerable heroines, Emmeline and Ethelinde, of a world in which power depends upon gender, rank and property, brings with it observations and criticism of society which lie at the roots of socio-political discourse in the years following the outbreak of the French Revolution. In these early novels, Smith is already engaging in substantial modification to the conventional plots of courtship novels and moving towards substantial critique of the status quo. Although, as yet, she lacks the political language to articulate this critique, this will become available to her during the composition of her third novel, *Celestina* (1791).

## Chapter Two

### The Impact of the French Revolution: *Celestina* (1791)

It is unsurprising that Smith's third novel, *Celestina*, employs the courtship structures characteristic of her previous novels.<sup>57</sup> *Emmeline* had already run into its third edition when Smith started writing *Celestina* in the summer of 1789, which was an encouraging indication of the potential for her future success in the genre.<sup>58</sup> Smith needed this publishing success to continue to support her family, remarking in 1789 that she was 'compelled to live only to write & write only to live'.<sup>59</sup> At this time she was living in Brighton, a centre for sympathisers with the Revolution and where, according to her sister Catherine Dorset's memoir, Smith 'formed acquaintance with some of the most violent advocates of the French Revolution, and unfortunately caught the contagion'.<sup>60</sup>

This 'contagion' is evident in *Celestina*, in which the simultaneous and opposing demands of the courtship genre and Smith's political excitement meet. Although the early part of the novel reiterates the critique of patriarchal social structures which is manifested in *Emmeline* and *Ethelinde*, in the final volume this critique becomes overtly politicised, particularly when the action of the novel moves from France to England. In this volume there is clear evidence that Smith is responding directly to polemic which was published during the period when she was writing the later sections of the novel. In particular, her use of Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790* as an intertext exemplifies a technique which henceforth characterises her novels:

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<sup>57</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Celestina* (1791), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 4, ed. by Kristina Straub. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>58</sup> For an account of its publishing history see *Emmeline*, pp. xiii-xix.

<sup>59</sup> Letter of 22 August 1789 to Dr Thomas Shirley, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 23.

<sup>60</sup> Catherine Turner Dorset, 'Charlotte Smith', in Walter Scott's *Lives of the Novelists* (1821); repr. in Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1834), pp. 20-58 (p. 49).

the echoing of the language as well as interaction with the ideas of the political polemic of the moment.<sup>61</sup>

The writing of *Celestina* coincided with major events in the progress of the Revolution: the storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789), the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (26 August 1789), and the march to the royal palace of Versailles by a mob, which forced the return of the French royal family to the palace of the Tuileries in Paris (5–6 October 1789). Polemical responses to these events in France soon appeared.<sup>62</sup> Key texts included *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*, a sermon by Richard Price, delivered on 4 November 1789, in which he compared the French Revolution to the English Revolution of 1688. He saw the newly-won freedoms of the former as a step forward from the theoretically-won, but not always practically-manifested freedoms gained by the latter.<sup>63</sup> Price's *Discourse* was an important catalyst for further spoken and written responses. Edmund Burke's riposte to Price in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was published on 1 November 1790.<sup>64</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* followed four weeks later, in direct oppositional response to Burke.<sup>65</sup> Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790*, a first-hand account of events in France, was also published in November 1790. Williams, unlike Wollstonecraft, was not writing in response to Burke, since the two writers published more or less simultaneously, Williams bringing her manuscript to England in September 1790 when she returned briefly from France.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England; Containing Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution; and Memoirs of Mons. and Madame du F ---* (London: T. Cadell, 1790). References are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

<sup>62</sup> For reprinted versions of major polemical texts, see Claeys, ed., *Political Writings of the 1790s*.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country, Delivered on Nov 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain* (London: T. Cadell, 1789).

<sup>64</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 71.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794) ed. by Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). References are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

<sup>66</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England* (1790), ed. by Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 21.



The importance of *Reflections* in the Revolution Debate is evidenced by the swift appearance of a huge number of responses.<sup>67</sup> Loraine Fletcher argues that in *Celestina* Smith is responding to Burke, particularly to his 'dominant metaphors' of 'the family and the castle or old house'.<sup>68</sup> An inset narrative in volume IV tells the early history of the rebellion of Ormond and Genevieve, the parents of Celestina, against patriarchal authority. This story is set in the semi-derelict French castle of Rochemorte, and ultimately ends in the separation and deaths of the young couple. Their orphaned baby, Celestina, is sent to a French convent from which she is adopted by a widow, Mrs Willoughby, an event which opens the novel. It is indeed tempting to assume that because this is a story of rebellion against patriarchal authority in the setting of a castle, Smith is responding exclusively to Burke's *Reflections*, since he made polemical use of the symbols of the castle and the patriarchal family to condemn what had already occurred in France in the years 1789-90 and to warn against what could happen in future in both France and England. Fletcher's argument seems feasible, therefore, when she says of Smith's interaction with *Reflections*: 'The construction of her Castle in this last volume is a comment on a book every literate man and woman in London or Brighton was talking about in November 1790'.<sup>69</sup>

However, on the basis of evidence from her letters, as well as from the novel itself, it is likely that if Smith at this time was influenced by any specific text, rather than simply demonstrating a general involvement with that political discourse in which *Reflections* played a major part, it was by Williams's *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790*. This work, which promoted Williams's pro-Revolutionary stance and described at first-hand what was happening in the new France, was the first volume of what would eventually be part of an eight volume series of letters. Neil Fraistat and

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<sup>67</sup> For numerical estimates of sales of and responses to *Reflections*, see Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 133.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Susan Lanser claim that Williams's *Letters* was more generally influential than Burke's *Reflections* during the first months of English reaction to the Revolution: 'Initially Williams's *Letters Written in France* was far more persuasive to English readers than Burke's ill-informed account, which shocked even the young Frenchman to whose enquiry Burke's *Reflections* is purportedly a response'.<sup>70</sup>

There is certainly strong evidence that Smith herself was interested in and influenced by Williams's work at this time. In a letter to the bookseller William Davies on 19 February 1790, Smith wrote, 'When Miss Williams's books come out, pray let me have a copy'.<sup>71</sup> Judith Stanton's editorial footnote states that Williams '*had* [my italics] published two works, her novel *Julia* and *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790*'.<sup>72</sup> The footnote is a little misleading since these works had, in fact, *not* yet been published when Smith requested them. Williams's *Julia, a Novel; Interspersed with Some Poetical Pieces*, which included the pro-Revolutionary poem entitled 'The Bastille, A Vision', was not published until March and *Letters* not until November, 1790.<sup>73</sup> The fact that Smith requests them in advance of publication suggests a strong interest in and knowledge of Williams's work. Whether or not Smith actually knew Williams at this time and thus had first-hand knowledge of the forthcoming works before their publication is not clear. Fraistat and Lanser suggest that the two writers met during the 1780s and Deborah Kennedy argues that they might have been introduced by their mutual acquaintance William Hayley during that period.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Fletcher thinks that Smith 'may have first met' Williams in Paris in the second half of

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<sup>70</sup> Williams, *Letters Written in France*, ed. by Fraistat and Lanser, pp. 32-3.

<sup>71</sup> Letter of 19 February 1790 to William Davies, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 25.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>73</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Julia, a Novel; Interspersed with Some Poetical Pieces* (London: T. Cadell, 1790).

<sup>74</sup> Williams, *Letters Written in France*, ed. by Fraistat and Lanser, p. 18; Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (Lewisburg, P.A: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 27.

1791.<sup>75</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter, the implications of Smith's request are that at the very least she has been discussing the forthcoming works with persons who had knowledge of Williams's ideas and projects.

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This chapter will demonstrate that in the first three volumes of *Celestina* Smith continues to interrogate and undermine patriarchal ideology within the framework of the courtship novel, using techniques already familiar from her previous novels, but that during the course of this work's composition her critique becomes politicised. I will show that although she is aware of Burke's arguments, Smith engages primarily with Williams's *Letters* and that it is this text which exerts the greatest effect upon the language and structure of the fourth and final volume of her novel.

Recycling the courtship story of *Emmeline*, *Celestina* narrates the adventures of a poor but virtuous heroine, of ostensibly dubious but actually noble origins, who marries a hero of rank and goes to live on a landed estate in the final chapter. At the beginning of the novel, Celestina lives with the Willoughby family on their hereditary estate, Alvestone, which, like Mowbray, has fallen into decline, partly because of financial mismanagement on the part of Mrs Willoughby's husband, but partly also because of the shortcomings of previous generations. Like Emmeline, Celestina is, for most of the narrative, without patriarchal protection and longing for the landed estate which she regards as a sanctuary. Smith uses the period in which Celestina leaves Alvestone after the death of Mrs Willoughby to satirise the greed and vanity of polite and aristocratic society, demonstrating across a range of characters that rank does not determine moral rectitude and that society's rewards should not, therefore, depend upon

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<sup>75</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 142.

it. However, as in *Emmeline*, she engineers an orthodox resolution to the novel despite this critique of high society; Celestina finally marries George Willoughby, the son of her benefactress, and returns to Alvestone, and although she has earned these conventional rewards by her virtue, she is also, like Emmeline, conveniently proved to be of legitimate and noble birth. She is revealed as the daughter of Genevieve, herself the daughter of a French aristocrat, and Ormond, the second son of an English nobleman.

While it is a feature of the genre that the patriarchal family must be allowed to fail, placing the heroine in a state of vulnerability, its failure, as I have noted in Chapter 1, also inevitably invites questions as to its validity. As Kristina Straub argues in the introduction to her edition of *Celestina*, there are several inadequate patriarchal figures who appear in the narrative, including the ‘figures of male authority’ who have already pre-conditioned the world into which Celestina is born, bleeding Alvestone dry with their expensive tastes and incompetence (pp. viii-ix). Just as patriarchy in the past has failed its dependents, the present is equally wanting. Celestina is left without protection, patriarchal or otherwise when she leaves Alvestone. Much later in the complex narrative she agrees to marry Willoughby and is with him at Alvestone preparing for the wedding. The day before the ceremony, Willoughby suddenly disappears without explanation, except for an enigmatic letter. (Not until the final volume is it made known that he had been told the lie that Celestina was his half-sister, born as a result of his mother’s alleged affair). In this predicament, the only father-figure who temporarily seems to offer security is Mr Thorold, the clergyman who was to solemnise her marriage to Willoughby. Mr Thorold persuades Celestina to live in his family home, but he is an ineffectual protector. Wrongly, he ‘did not think the presence of his two sons at home, a sufficient reason for withdrawing his generous kindness from Celestina [...] to whom he loved to consider himself as a guardian and protector’(p. 119). He is unable to

keep Montague, his younger son, under sufficient control to prevent the latter's obsessive, lovelorn pursuit of her. She therefore leaves Mr Thorold's home, travelling to the Isle of Skye in an attempt to escape Montague's unwanted attentions and for the rest of the novel looks to the friendship of women for help rather than to the protection afforded by a father-substitute.

The critique of the inadequacies and self-indulgence of patriarchy is not confined to the main narrative strand, for Smith inserts a lengthy tale of patriarchal oppression in the story of Jessy Cathcart (née Woodburn), a servant whom Celestina meets by chance when both are travelling unaccompanied to Devon and with whom she forms a friendship, despite the difference in their social standings. The story of Jessy's family is one of paternal tyranny and cruelty repeated over two generations. Her grandfather was a rich farmer who had oppressed Jessy's mother, disowned her when she married against his will and refused to respond to her even when she sent a message from her death-bed begging for forgiveness. Jessy herself had been forced to leave the family home to escape her stepmother and go into service in Exeter, a life she describes in all its gruelling hardship (pp. 51-5). Her undeserved suffering is caused by the two men who should have offered her protection: her grandfather who refuses even to acknowledge her and her father who does nothing to prevent Jessy being virtually enslaved in the service of her stepmother.

As is the case with *Emmeline*, Smith's use of inset narratives of the marital and sexual experience of subsidiary female characters, questions and undermines the validity of the traditional claims made for the desirability and security of marriage. The stories of the dysfunctional marriage of Sophy Elphinstone and the fate of Emily Cathcart function in a similar way to the stories of Mrs Stafford and Lady Adelina in *Emmeline*. The women are portrayed as victims both within and without marriage, so

that their stories are a comment on the institution itself and wider issues of expectations of female behaviour in a male-dominated society.

Sophy Elphinstone is a sister of Cathcart, Jessy's husband. It is with Sophy that Celestina travels to Skye, where the former's husband has secured a job in the fishing industry. Sophy's married life has been one of misfortune and suffering of which she says, 'Could I *then* have foreseen all the misery that was in store for me, how should I have shrunk from a destiny so insupportable' (p. 189). Her difficulties are caused in part by misfortune but also by her husband's folly and volatility. However, Sophy forgives and remains loyal to her husband, learning resignation and living without 'any other wish than to see my children well, and to be able to find them bread' (p. 200).

Emily, Sophy's sister, is persuaded at the age of fifteen to elope with Beresford, a young man who has no intention of marrying her. She later becomes a courtesan, reappearing in the narrative when she meets Sophy by chance and gives her money from the 'wages of shame' to buy medical help for her dying baby son: 'Whatever may be my failings, or my errors, I trust that among them will never be reckoned, want of love to my relations, whether they will acknowledge or no' (p. 196). Emily's selfless concern for the wellbeing of others extends to her lover, Vavasour, who is in love with Celestina; Emily tries on her death bed to persuade Celestina to marry him as a way of bringing him happiness. Despite her sexual transgressions, Emily's apotheosis is complete when Smith describes her at the point of death from consumption. Her beauty remained, 'though its lustre was gone' and her eyes 'had the dazzling radiance of ethereal fire'; only people who 'had hearts unhappily rigid, could behold, without feeling the sense of her errors suspended or overwhelmed by strong emotions of the tenderest pity' (p. 417).

The critique of marriage in this novel, unlike that in *Emmeline* and *Ethelinde*, touches the main courtship plot, hinting at the inadequacy of the hero himself.

Celestina's idealised marriage to George Willoughby, after a narrative which is concerned largely with the achievement of that goal in the face of seemingly overwhelming difficulties, is diminished by the presentation of the hero himself, whom Jacqueline Labbe has described as 'far from perfect: indecisive and vacillating, self-justifying and self-dramatizing.'<sup>76</sup> Straub argues that Willoughby is one of a trio of suitors to Celestina, all of whom contribute to Smith's reassessment of the 'moral grounds to gendered financial power in the eighteenth century' (p. viii). The first of several flawed heroes in a critique of marriage which Smith develops in later novels, Willoughby responds emotionally and erratically to situations which demand difficult moral choices, behaviour which brings some sense of qualification to the courtship novel marital resolution.

Willoughby's flaws are largely matters of emotional ill-judgement. For example, despite being in love with Celestina, he unwisely makes a promise to his mother on her deathbed that he will go through with a marriage to Miss Fitz-Hayman, the daughter and only child of his uncle, Lord Castlenorth, a decision which he later regrets, since it forces him later into an unenviable choice between love and duty. The arrangement, which had long been the wish of Mrs Willoughby and Lord Castlenorth, meant that Willoughby would inherit Castlenorth's title as well as receiving a large amount of money with the marriage, thus solving the financial problems of the Alvestone estate and securing it for future generations of the family. Later in the novel, when he is about to marry Celestina, he is told by Lady Castlenorth, his aunt, that Celestina is his half-sister. His reaction is to abandon Celestina the day before their wedding, leaving her without any knowledge of the reason for his sudden departure. At one point during their separation, Willoughby encounters Celestina at a public gathering, where he is too overcome to speak to her, leaving her in further confusion and extreme distress (pp.

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<sup>76</sup> Jacqueline Labbe, 'Narrating Seduction: Charlotte Smith and Jane Austen', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), pp.113-28 (p. 113).

286-9). She spends most of the remainder of the narrative in this state of ignorance, staying faithful to him despite his thoughtless disregard for her feelings.

A further indication of the distance between Willoughby and the idealised heroes of Smith's previous novels is that he ultimately secures Alvestone in a morally dubious fashion, through taking up a legacy which Lord Castlenorth adds in a codicil to his will. This codicil is added in the expectation of Willoughby's marriage to Miss Fitz-Hayman, but Castlenorth dies before he learns that the marriage has been cancelled by the mutual consent of the couple. Willoughby, however, has no moment of doubt as to whether to accept the bequest and he uses it to secure Alvestone as the marital home for himself and Celestina.

Alvestone is the ultimate object of desire for both heroine and hero, and, as in *Emmeline*, Smith uses the story of the struggle for the inheritance of a noble house and estate to present an implicit debate about the power structures of society and the need for their reform. In the final volume of the novel, this debate is expressed overtly in the rhetoric of radical discourse and is even more obviously at odds with the social stasis of the resolution of the novel. There is a point when Smith's contact with the world of political discussion becomes apparent, almost as if during the course of the writing of a chapter, the 'contagion' mentioned by Catherine Dorset, takes hold.<sup>77</sup>

Willoughby has been in a 'state of continual debate and perplexity' (p. 308). His original dilemma had been the choice between love and duty: his love for the poverty-stricken Celestina and his deathbed promise to his mother to save Alvestone by marrying for money. Although he chooses love, once he thinks that Celestina is his half-sister, the debate becomes one between duty to his mother, to the estate and family, manifested in a loveless marriage to Miss Fitz-Hayman for money, and his own unwillingness to endure such a fate. As he considers these unhappy options, the internal

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<sup>77</sup> See Dorset, *Memoir*, cited above, Chapter 2, p. 37.



dialogue moves seamlessly into a different choice, between the traditional values of rank and inherited property and the politically radical values of freedom and equality in a restructured society:

Since he must be miserable, it might as well be in following, as in flying, from what he still thought was in some sense a duty -- completing the engagement he had made to his mother on her death-bed. In doing this, he should gratify all his surviving relations, and retrieve his estate, which he must otherwise sell, as the mortgages on it were rapidly devouring it: and to do this was, as he sometimes tried to persuade himself, to pay a debt he owed his ancestors. [...]

‘I shall not only retrieve’, said he, ‘but augment my fortune: not only save Alvestone, but add to my present estates the family possessions of my mother, which will become the property of strangers; the honours so long inherited by her ancestors will be mine.’

He frequently made efforts to fix his mind on these advantages; but the moment he began seriously to investigate their value, he beheld them with contempt.

‘Ridiculous!’ cried he, ‘My ancestors! What is this foolish family pride, for which I am meditating to sell my freedom, in acquiescence with narrow prejudice? I shall have a large estate: but will it make me happier in myself, or more respected by those whose respect can afford me pleasure? [...] I shall have a bauble called a coronet painted on my coach door, and my hall chairs, and shall become one of the legislature, qualified for it only by the possession of that bauble. [...] My ancestors, “from their airy clouds”, will be infinitely delighted by the glory of their descendant.

‘But what will that descendant be in reality? a mercenary, a miserable wretch: condemned to pass his life with a woman, whom, if he does not loath, he does not love; to feel himself a purchased husband; and to have sold, in sad exchange, man’s best birthright, freedom, for a mess of pottage’. (pp. 318-9)

Straub argues that the moment when ‘the insinuation of a political message is evident’ is rather later than this point in the narrative, when Smith brings Willoughby to Revolutionary France (p. 443). However, the language and sentiments of the above passage, specifically Willoughby’s references to ‘prejudice’ and the importance of inheritance, bring to mind Burke’s arguments in *Reflections* which claim that ‘prejudice’, that is to say the acquired experience of many generations, is more reliable

as a source of wisdom than personal opinion and, moreover, is essential to the stability of society.<sup>78</sup> The citing of ‘freedom’ and ‘a man’s best birth-right’, in opposition to such views, locates Willoughby’s sentiments within a recognisably political discourse inflected by Burke, Smith drawing on the kind of political conversations which must have been part of her acquaintanceship with the ‘violent advocates of the French Revolution’ in Brighton.<sup>79</sup> Within a couple of paragraphs, however, traditional values reassert themselves:

To think that the place to which he had been so fondly attached should become the property of some upstart man of sudden fortune was accompanied by a sense of acute uneasiness. He imagined, those beautiful woods, the growth of centuries, fallen in compliance with the improving taste of a broker or warehouseman; the park ploughed up, to be converted into farms.  
(p. 319)

This juxtaposition of arguments and counter-arguments in a debating manner, whether external or internal, is a technique which Smith was to employ in subsequent novels as a way of introducing and promoting politically radical ideas.

Shortly after this period of soul-searching, Willoughby’s engagement to Miss Fitz-Hayman is broken off by mutual consent and he finally decides to free himself from all attachment to England, setting off for France and giving orders for Alvestone to be put up for sale. In this connection, Smith mentions approvingly ‘the tumults, with which a noble struggle for freedom at this time (the summer of 1789) agitated the capital, and many of the great towns of France’ (p. 373). This is the point at which Smith moves from a general questioning of the values which inform the power structures of England into specific endorsement of that political change which has been accomplished in France. In this she was sharing with many English radicals an admiration for what they perceived as the sweeping away of an unjust regime.

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<sup>78</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 87.

<sup>79</sup> See Dorset, *Memoir*, cited above, Chapter 2, p. 37.

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In volume IV, the focus of the novel shifts from the landed estate of Alvestone to the castle of Rochemorte, at which Willoughby arrives by a series of chance encounters. Here he uncovers the story of Celestina's parents, Ormond and Genevieve and their friends, Bellegarde and Jacquolina. This story has many close similarities, in terms of plot, imagery and political sentiment to a story told by Williams in her *Letters*, which was, revealingly, later described by her as 'a form of commentary on the Declaration of the Rights of Man'.<sup>80</sup> Williams's story of her friends, the Du Fossé family, which makes up the matter of Letters XVI-XXII, is both a narrative of patriarchal oppression and a family romance in which the castle home is a fortress from which youthful escape is necessary and in which imprisonment is a recurrent motif.

As I have already noted in Chapter 1, images of patriarchal families, noble houses and estates and castles are of central importance in English political discourse during the years following the outbreak of the French Revolution. Both Williams and Burke are drawing on a common political rhetoric when they employ images of castles and patriarchal families to promote their diametrically opposed opinions of the political changes in France.

The image of a castle as the representation of the state or constitution, which was already a familiar one, is recurrent and pervasive in *Reflections*. Burke uses images of inherited land and noble houses, to frame his argument against the French abolition of the *ancien régime*. In England, where the 'natural landed interest' still prevails, the constitution still functions as 'an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers', to be 'transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the

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<sup>80</sup> See Williams, *Letters Written in France*, ed. by Fraistat and Lanser, p. 15.

people of this kingdom'.<sup>81</sup> An entailment is not allowed to be broken up, but has to be preserved, just as the constitution should be preserved:

It is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society, or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes.<sup>82</sup>

The passing through the generations of inherited property, house and estate is essential to the stability of society and the integrity of its law and Burke places the 'solidity of property' alongside other essential ingredients of a stable society such as 'morality and religion' and 'peace and order'.<sup>83</sup> In France, Burke argues, this link has been broken, with 'property' literally being removed from its owners, as well as figuratively in the destruction of hierarchical power structures.

As well as employing the image of the house or castle, Burke draws on the long-established polemical trope of the 'family romance', in which the microcosm of the patriarchal family represented the macrocosm of the king and country. The analogy between the father's authority over his children and the rule of a king over his subjects was central to contemporary political discourse in France and elsewhere, as the historian Lynne Hunt has argued.<sup>84</sup> Burke's use of this trope is apparent in his account of the removal of the French royal family from Versailles to the Tuileries; an event which undermined the authority of the monarchy is presented as a personal violation of the patriarchal home and family.<sup>85</sup> The philosophical argument that the patriarchal family paralleled the relationship between king and subject had been notably articulated by Sir Robert Filmer, who explained the connection between monarchical and paternal authority in his *Patriarcha or the Natural Power of Kings* (1680). According to Filmer,

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<sup>81</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. by L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 44, 33.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>84</sup> Lynne Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>85</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 71.

the first kings were fathers of families and the story of Adam, the first father and head of family, provided the template for what he terms the 'natural' system of power and inheritance, patriarchal and based on primogeniture. The authority of Adam, the first father, over his children was mirrored in that of a king over his subjects:

If we compare the natural duties of a father with those of a king, we find them to be all one, without any difference at all but only in the latitude or extent of them [...] the duties of a king are summed up in an universal fatherly care of his people.<sup>86</sup>

Burke's famous description in *Reflections* of the attack on the French royal family at Versailles on 6 October 1789 condenses images of house, family and father with the relationship between subjects and king and the well-being of the nation. He describes the queen's awakening from a few hours of sleep by the voice of her guard, who was then immediately killed:

A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and a husband, not secure of his own life for a moment.

This king, to say no more of him, and his queen, and their infant children (who once would have been the pride and hope of a great and generous people) were then forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, and strewn with mutilated limbs and carcasses. Thence they were conducted to the capital of their kingdom.<sup>87</sup>

The attack is, in a literal sense, the destruction of the safety and inviolability of the house, the property of the family, and a threat to the very survival of the family itself. At a figurative level it describes a catastrophic break with the inherited power of kings and the ancient order of a stable society.

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<sup>86</sup> Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. by J.P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 71.

Williams's use of both the family romance and the image of a castle is rooted in the same inherited discourse, but in diametric contrast to Burke's employment of them, patriarchal families and noble houses are imaged as loci of oppression and it is with Williams's use of these tropes, rather than Burke's, that Smith is in accord. Smith also draws on Williams's exploitation of the techniques of extended sentimental fictional narrative, particularly the section of *Letters* which relates the history of Williams's friends, the Du Fossé family. Williams draws attention to her own incorporation of the political into the framework of sentimental fiction when she states that 'my political creed is entirely an affair of the heart' and asks at the conclusion of the Du Fossé story, 'Has it not the air of a romance? [...] Does not the old Baron die in exactly the right place; at the very page one would choose?'<sup>88</sup>

The Du Fossé family romance is complex, extending over fourteen years and has at its heart the oppression of a son, Antoine, by a despotic father, the Baron. In Letter XVI, at the beginning of the story, Williams identifies the Baron with the *ancien régime*:

The Baron's austerity was not indeed confined to his son, but extended to all his dependants. Formed by nature for the support of the antient government of France, he maintained his aristocratic rights with unrelenting severity, ruled his feudal tenures with a rod of iron and considered the lower order of people as a set of beings whose existence was tolerated merely for the use of the nobility.<sup>89</sup>

The Baron refuses his son permission to marry a woman of 'obscure birth', so the couple are married in secret by a priest 'at the solemn hour of midnight', one of many details which gives the factual account a novelistic quality.<sup>90</sup> Madame Du Fossé gives birth to a son, but her husband is forced to leave them and flee the country because he is

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<sup>88</sup> Williams, *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790*, Letter XXIII, p. 196; Letter IX, p. 66; Letter XXII, p. 194.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter XVI, p. 124.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter XVI, p. 129.

suspected of having written an anti-aristocratic pamphlet and only just escapes being sent to the Bastille.<sup>91</sup>

Two years later, when Du Fossé makes his peace with the authorities and is about to take up his life with his family in France, he learns that his father 'was making application for a *lettre de cachet*, in order to confine his daughter-in-law for the rest of her life; and had also obtained power to have his son seized and imprisoned'.<sup>92</sup> *Lettres de cachet* were documents signed by the King at the request of private individuals. The documents authorized another person's imprisonment without trial and often without indication of duration.

The Du Fossé couple escape first to Geneva and then to England. In England they are married under English law, their daughter is born and they manage to survive at a subsistence level for two years.<sup>93</sup> They had left their infant son 'at nurse' near Caen, where he later dies.<sup>94</sup> Under false pretences of a possible reconciliation and some financial support, the Baron lures his son back to France, where he is seized from his room at midnight by two officers of the law, who are accompanied by his father and an armed servant. Du Fossé is taken to the convent of St. Yon near Rouen and thrown into a dungeon where he remains for two years, refusing to obtain his liberty in exchange for renouncing his wife. Eventually he does make good his escape to England, is reunited with his wife and daughter and remains there until his return to France on the day after the storming of the Bastille.<sup>95</sup>

The ancient castle and the prison are recurrent and interconnected images in *Letters* as a whole as well as specifically in the Du Fossé narrative. For example, by way of defending the actions of those who have brought about change in France

Williams writes:

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Letter XVI, p. 130.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., Letter XVI, pp. 130-1.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., Letter XVI, p. 133.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Letter XVII, p. 138.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Letter XXII, p. 189.

It appears evident that the temple of Freedom which they are erecting, even if imperfect in some of its proportions, must be preferable to the old gloomy Gothic fabric which they have laid in ruins. [...] The old constitution is connected in my mind with the image of a friend confined in the gloomy recesses of a dungeon and pining in hopeless captivity.<sup>96</sup>

Williams also gives an account of her visit to the Bastille and accords 'glory' to the citizens who stormed it. The 'dungeons' of the place are identified with the *ancien régime*, for 'to these regions of horror were human creatures dragged at the caprice of despotic power'.<sup>97</sup>

In the Du Fossé story specifically, castles are the sites for the symbolic power struggles between old and new. The chateau of the Baron is the power base from which he exerts his authority, but ultimately it is passed to the younger Du Fossé in a way which symbolises the triumph of the new order, for the latter immediately takes possession of the place on his return to France after the fall of the Bastille.<sup>98</sup> A reminder of previous imprisonment, with the comment that he 'no more feared that his repose at night would be broken by the entrance of ruffians prepared to drag him to dungeons', highlights the freedom which comes literally and figuratively at this point in the narrative.<sup>99</sup> For Williams, 'ruffians' are agents of despotic power, unlike Burke's 'ruffians' who, when they break into the queen's bedroom, are culpable citizens attacking the power of the *ancien régime*.<sup>100</sup>

Imprisonment, in the Bastille and elsewhere, together with reference to *lettres de cachet*, represents in the Du Fossé narrative the oppression of the *ancien régime*, Williams linking the Bastille to *lettres de cachet* at the conclusion of the story, with her comment that 'France is now a country which could no longer boast a Bastille' and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Letter IX, pp. 67-8, 71-2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Letter III, p. 23.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Letter XXII, p. 194

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Letter XXI, p. 190.

<sup>100</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 71.



where ‘dungeons were thrown open, and where justice was henceforth to shed a clear and steady light, without one dark shade of relief from lettres de cachet’.<sup>101</sup>

Perceptions of the Bastille as ‘a symbol of French despotism’ were prevalent in England as well as France, as Norbert Schurer has argued. Details of its fall were quickly disseminated in England, as it was enacted in stage representations as early as August 1789 in London, as well as being the subject of caricatures and newspaper reports.<sup>102</sup> *Lettres de cachet* were seen by French radicals as major symbols of despotic injustice and were abolished in March 1790.

Williams’s early awareness of the Bastille’s symbolic importance is demonstrated in her poem ‘The Bastille, A Vision’, which was written before she went to France in 1790. It appeared in her novel *Julia* (1790) and describes a prisoner’s prophetic dream in which the place is destroyed; ‘It falls -- the guilty fabric falls’ and there is the hope that from its ruins, ‘Shall Freedom’s sacred temple rise’.<sup>103</sup> Later, when she was resident in France she wrote at some length in *Letters* of her visit to the ruins of the Bastille and the story of its storming.<sup>104</sup> The symbolic importance of both the Bastille and *lettres de cachet* is evidenced in an ‘enumerative table’ published in France in November 1790. This lists thirty ‘Beneficial Effects of the Revolution’ in which the destruction of the Bastille and the abolition of *lettres de cachet* are first and second, before even the establishment of the principle of the Rights of Man, which is sixth.<sup>105</sup>

It is true that the use of sentimental novelistic narrative to deliver a political message is a feature of *Reflections* and indeed other polemical texts of the period, but

<sup>101</sup> Williams, *Letters* (1790), Letter XXII, pp. 193-4.

<sup>102</sup> Norbert Schurer, ‘The Storming of the Bastille in English Newspapers’, *Eighteenth Century Life*, 29 (2005), 50-81, (p. 53).

<sup>103</sup> Williams, ‘The Bastille. A Vision’, in *Julia, a Novel; Interspersed with Some Poetical Pieces*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1790), vol. II, pp. 218-23 (p. 221).

<sup>104</sup> Williams, *Letters* (1790), Letter IV, pp. 24-34 and Letter V, pp. 39-40.

<sup>105</sup> *Enumerative Table: Beneficial Effects of the French Revolution* (1790), repr. in translation in Fraistat & Lanser, Appendix F, pp. 260-2.

Smith's narrative of Bellegarde and Jacqueline, Genevieve and Ormond, is particularly indebted to the history of the Du Fossés to the extent that either one would need minimal reworking to sit easily in the other text.

Smith's narrative is more complex since it deals with the inter-related adventures of two couples, but the similarities to Williams's narrative are apparent from the outset. Bellegarde, like Antoine Du Fossé, is brought up in a castle by an autocratic, cruel father, who represents the despotism of the *ancien régime*, for 'his vassals, and his sons [...] were the victims of his harsh and imperious spirit' (p. 392). Bellegarde eventually escapes his rule by going into the army but years later he secretly returns to the chateau to rescue his sister, Genevieve, from the unwelcome sexual attentions of a Jesuit priest who had been entrusted with her education. Bellegarde travels in disguise with his friend, Ormond, the younger son of an English nobleman and the two young men hide in the castle for a length of time sufficient for both to fall in love with and marry women they meet there. Ormond falls in love with Genevieve. Bellegarde, like Du Fossé, falls in love with a woman of lower rank, in this case Genevieve's companion Jacqueline, the daughter of one of Bellegarde's father's 'vassals' (p. 399). The couples marry in secret and both women become pregnant, but they are soon betrayed, probably by the monk who married them.

Bellegarde is sent to the Bastille on the authority of a *lettre de cachet* obtained by his father, released two years later and forced back into the army, eventually travelling with his regiment to America, where he fights against the British in the War of Independence and is influenced by new ideas of liberty. Ormond also spends time in the Bastille and coincidentally also goes to America with his regiment. Despite the two men being soldiers in opposing armies, Bellegarde is able to be with Ormond when he dies of wounds. He then returns to France, visits Jacqueline in the convent where she has been forced to take the veil and is immediately re-imprisoned, this time in the

fortress of Mont St. Michel (p. 412). Like Du Fossé, he is imprisoned on the grounds that he has been writing anti-establishment pamphlets. In Bellegarde's case this is not merely suspected but an acknowledged intention to 'add fuel to that fire, which immediately after the war in America was kindled, though it yet burned but feebly in France' (p. 412). His release does not come until four or five years later when, with the coming of the Revolution, his 'country became free' (p. 412).

The fate of the two women is similarly driven by despotic injustice, one being imprisoned, one dying and both, as in the Du Fossé story, being forced to be separated from their infants. Genevieve gives birth to a daughter, Celestina, who is taken from her by Bellegrade's father and sent away to be brought up in a convent. Genevieve dies shortly after the birth because of the 'anguish of mind she had suffered at having her child taken from her' (p. 407). Jacqueline also gives birth to a daughter, Anzoletta, from whom she is parted and then forced to live for many years in the convent, imprisoned by her vows. Her release is anticipated when Bellegarde claims he is 'assured that she will very soon be restored to me' (p. 413). This is possible because the laws to allow monks and nuns to leave convents were introduced in February 1790, when existing monastic vows were invalidated and the taking of new ones forbidden.

Smith, like Williams, uses the image of the castle to represent the passing of authority from the old to the new regime. Bellegarde inherits Castle Rochemorte, the gloomy Gothic fabric of which has fallen nearly into ruin, but which is now moving into a new incarnation because of the Revolution. As Fletcher points out, Smith contrasts the darkness of the towers which 'rose in frowning grandeur' and which symbolise the past and the renewal represented by the filling of the ruins with the sounds of birds and with the natural growth of flowers (p. 385).<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, pp.135-6.

There is also a close affinity between Smith's use of narratives of imprisonment and that of Williams, including reference to *Lettres de Cachet*. For example, the account of Du Fossé's fear of being dragged by 'ruffians' to dungeons is similar to Bellegarde's account of his own capture in Rochemorte Castle and removal to the dungeons of the Bastille. Bellegarde describes the way in which after midnight he was woken by his wife's screams and then 'stunned by a blow which one of the ruffians who surrounded me aimed at the back of my head' (p. 402). Incarcerated in the Bastille, he is 'confined by heavy chains' and when he enquires why he is 'thus fettered like a malefactor', he is shown a 'Lettre de Cachet, which directed him to be conveyed to the Bastille' (p. 402). As well as being a prisoner in the Bastille, Bellegarde is later imprisoned in the 'gloomy prison' of the fortress of Mont St. Michel (p. 412).

This latter detail is of special significance, since the fortress also had symbolic importance to Revolutionaries. Williams writes in *Letters* of her visit to it, describing the destruction of 'a wooden cage' situated in a dungeon. The cage was an 'instrument of tyranny' for the confinement of prisoners and had been destroyed by Mons. de Chartres, who seized a hatchet and levelled it to the ground. In Williams's opinion he 'thus may claim the glory of having, even before the demolition of the Bastille, begun the French Revolution'.<sup>107</sup> The symbolic value of the action is enhanced by the identity of Mons. de Chartres, formerly Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orleans, a 'prince of the blood' who renounced his title in line with Revolutionary principles (and, ironically, would actually assume the throne in 1830). The doffing of aristocratic titles was an important symbol of the Revolutionary abolition of the nobility, persons of rank choosing voluntarily to change their names to those of commoners to show their support. Williams devotes much of Letter V to the importance of the renunciation of titles and describes Mons. de Chartres as 'a confirmed friend of the new constitution of France,

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<sup>107</sup> Williams, *Letters* (1790), Letter V, pp. 39-40.

and willing, with the enthusiasm of a young and ardent mind, to renounce the splendour of titles for the general good'.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Bellegarde makes clear his Revolutionary credentials in his decision to discard his title and take on the name of Montignac, which he describes as 'my *untitled* name, the original designation of my family' (p. 412).

As with the Du Fossé narrative, an image of prison precedes the celebration of the new order; in the case of Bellegarde, it is in the same paragraph, when he is literally released from the fortress of Mont St. Michel, where he has been incarcerated for four or five years and then learns that his father has died and that he is the heir to the chateau. The end of his imprisonment and the end of the thralldom of the French people are described in the rhetoric of the Revolution, in which, as Ronald Paulson has shown, there is a 'contrast between light-enlightenment-reason-freedom versus darkness-ignorance-imprisonment'.<sup>109</sup> Bellegarde exults that 'The glorious flame of liberty, of which I only saw the first feeble rays, burst forth -- I regained my personal freedom, when my country became free -- I found my father dead!' (p. 412).

For both writers images of imprisonment are part of a critique of the misuse of power, by religious as well as state authorities. Convents are prisons in two respects. Firstly, places such as the convent of St. Yon offer dungeons to supplement those of the state. Secondly, the convent can be used as a place of imprisonment for women, with the taking of religious vows which are sometimes enforced and from which there is no release. Enforced incarceration behind the symbolic barrier of the convent grate is the central image of the story of Jacquolina. On one occasion Bellegarde goes to the convent in disguise as a woman and is thus able to speak to her: 'I would have forced myself through the grate, which was one of those which are so narrow as scarcely to admit a hand. [...] She knew me, and caught hold of the bars to save herself from falling' (pp. 408-9). On the second occasion he holds the child Anzoletta to the grate

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Letter V, p. 35.

<sup>109</sup> Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution, 1789-1820* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 46.

and it is his desperation at this point which causes him to say, write and do things which give his father the excuse to have him locked away in Mont St. Michel (p. 412). The fictitious account of Jacqueline's incarceration harmonises with Williams's account of her visit to Rouen where she meets three nuns who 'had been forced by their parents to take the veil'.<sup>110</sup> She visits several convents and in one, goes through the wrong door and finds 'in a room grated across the middle with iron bars, a young man sitting on one side of the grate, and a young nun on the other'. Williams asks, 'Where can a young woman appear so interesting, as when seen within that gloomy barrier, which death alone can remove?'<sup>111</sup> The question invites an answer of the kind which Jacqueline's story provides, for the final glimpse of the convent grate is when Willoughby takes a letter to her from Bellegarde which the 'interesting, and still lovely young nun' reads (p. 413).

Williams writes at the conclusion of the Du Fossé story that 'under the antient government of France' which she terms 'the iron hand of despotism', the outcome for the whole family would have been different, for 'justice and virtue might have been overthrown'.<sup>112</sup> In similar vein, Smith has Bellegarde rejoice in the passing of the time when 'power did everything in France, and nature and justice were silenced' (p. 409). Both stories thus present a picture of a despotic regime in France which needed to be overthrown.

Such similarities demonstrate that Williams and Smith are part of the same radical discourse, drawing on the same political rhetoric; but the cumulative evidence of this chapter also suggests that Smith's politically inflected narrative draws direct inspiration from those narratives which Williams provides in *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790*. This way of embedding of the political writing of contemporary

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Letter XVI, p. 119.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., Letter XVI, pp. 113-4.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., Letter XXII, pp. 190-1.

polemical writers within the courtship novel is henceforth a major feature of Smith's novels. Together with the continuing undermining of traditional suppositions about the patriarchal family, marriage and the inheritance of property, it enables her third novel, *Desmond* (1792), to become a vehicle for the promotion of explicitly radical political ideas.

## Chapter Three

### Debating the Revolution: *Desmond* (1792)

*Desmond*, published in June 1792 and, like *Celestina*, written mainly in Brighton, is both a work of fiction and a vehicle for Smith's political arguments for a reformed England, incorporating some of the major topics of debate which engaged polemical writers in the early 1790s.<sup>113</sup> *Desmond* responds directly to Edmund Burke's *Reflections* as well as to other polemical material, including the first part of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, which was published in 1791, when Smith was writing this novel.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, Smith's choice of the epistolary form suggests not only that she is responding to *Reflections*, itself framed as part of an exchange of letters, but the continuing influence of Williams's *Letters*, in which a female writer successfully presented a political agenda using the epistolary form with a sentimental inflection. I will also show that although Smith's politically radical stance in this novel is therefore comfortably situated as congruent with the sentimental epistolary form, it is increasingly at odds with the needs of the plot of the conventional courtship novel with its resolution in marriage which perpetuates the patriarchal family and secures the transmission of landed property. Smith attempts to negotiate the tension between two conflicting and irreconcilable demands, those of exploring the implications of political radicalism and the need to produce and sell her fourth novel to her readers. I shall be arguing that important techniques whereby Smith makes this negotiation include her giving protagonists the

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<sup>113</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Desmond* (1792), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 5, ed. by Stuart Curran. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791 and 1792), *Common Sense and Other Writings*, ed. by Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). References are to this edition unless otherwise stated.



role of observers and reporters, both of events, in the manner of Williams, and of political conversations and debates. She also develops further an experimental strategy already employed in her earlier novels: the use of subsidiary and contrasted narratives which undermine the dominant ideology of the main courtship plot without overtly challenging it.

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Smith's choice of the epistolary form at this time is particularly apposite, since it was an important polemical form during the period of the writing of *Desmond*, between 1791 and 1792. Many polemical pamphlets were published, ostensibly as letters to Burke, in response to *Reflections*, which is itself framed as a letter. (Burke had been sent two letters by Charles-Jean-François Depont, asking him his opinions about events in France, to which Burke claims to be replying in *Reflections*).<sup>115</sup> The popularity of the form for polemic is proved by the large number of 'letters' reprinted in Gregory Claeys's selection of political writings of the 1790s, which includes pamphlets as diverse as the anti-Burke *A Letter from the Earl Stanhope to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1790) and the loyalist *Intercepted Correspondence from Satan to Citizen Paine* (c.1792).<sup>116</sup> Anne Mellor and others have argued that it is Smith's intention that *Desmond* should be seen as a 'direct response' to Burke and that this intention is clearly signalled by her use of the initials of the names of the correspondents Desmond and Erasmus Bethel to mirror those of Depont and Edmund Burke.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 293, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Stanhope, *A Letter from the Earl of Stanhope to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (Dublin: 1790), in *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. Gregory Claeys, 8 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1995), 1, pp. 2-11; Anonymous, *Intercepted Correspondence from Satan to Citizen Paine* (c.1792), in Claeys, 5, p. 412.

<sup>117</sup> Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 107. For further discussion of Smith's paralleling of Bethel and Desmond with Burke and Depont, see, for example: *Desmond* (1792), ed. by Antje Blank and Janet Todd

Smith recognises, however, that as a woman, promulgating overtly political opinions, she is inviting criticism by trying to break into the male sphere of politics. 'Women it is said have no business with politics', she notes in her Preface, observing that 'they are censured as affecting masculine knowledge if they happen to have any understanding; or despised as insignificant triflers if they have none' (p. 3). The problem which she identifies is exemplified by the gendered criticism incurred by Mary Wollstonecraft on her entry into male discursive territory in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). *The Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, in a review of the second edition, which, unlike the first edition, bore Wollstonecraft's name, mocked her intrusion into male discourse: 'The *rights of men* asserted by a fair lady! The age of chivalry cannot be over or the sexes have changed their ground.' It continued, 'Miss Williams is half afraid of *shivering lances*; but Mrs Wollstonecraft enters the lists armed cap-à-pie'.<sup>118</sup> Williams is contrasted, rather than grouped with Wollstonecraft, by the reviewer. The reason for this distinction is probably that Williams chose to write in the feminised form of sentimental epistolary narrative. As Deborah Kennedy has argued, in choosing this form, Williams tried to 'reassure her critics that she was not usurping the role of a male political observer; rather, she was reading the French Revolution as a woman, or responding with her heart to the events in France'. Such a stance made easier the acceptance of *Letters*, which employed the 'rhetoric of sensibility, and therefore enabled her to retain her femininity, even though she is writing about politics'.<sup>119</sup>

Smith shrewdly made the same choice as Williams in her adoption of the sentimental epistolary form and it is clear that during the writing of *Desmond*, as of *Celestina*, Smith was looking to Williams's work as a source of information and

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(Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 22; Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, p. 84.

<sup>118</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 61 (February, 1791), 151-4.

<sup>119</sup> Deborah Kennedy, 'Benevolent Historian: Helen Maria Williams and Her British Readers', in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. by Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), pp. 316-36 (pp. 318, 320).

inspiration. External evidence of this is her request to the bookseller William Davies: 'Send me Miss Williams's farewell to England by the bearer'.<sup>120</sup> This poem, entitled *A Farewell for Two Years, to England* and written before Williams returned to France in September 1791, shares with *Letters* an enthusiasm for the 'change sublime in GALLIA'S state'.<sup>121</sup> It is likely also that Smith would have had conversations with Williams during the period of the writing of *Desmond*, since, as Jacqueline Labbe has shown from a recently discovered letter from Smith to her publisher, Cadell, Smith visited France during the autumn of 1791.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, when she returned to England she supplied Wordsworth with an introduction to Williams just before he travelled to France in the same year.<sup>123</sup> As Stuart Curran argues in his editorial introduction to the novel, it is thus 'not to be believed' that Smith had neither met Williams during this year nor visited her when both were in France (p. ix).

All the protagonists of Smith's novel contribute letters to the narrative, although the majority are those written by the hero, Lionel Desmond, and his older mentor, Erasmus Bethel, with whom he shares details of his personal life and his politics. Desmond's love for a virtuous but unhappily-married woman, Geraldine Verney, which he realises cannot be consummated, leads him to travel to France, as companion-mentor to Waverly, Geraldine's wayward brother. In France, Desmond witnesses at first-hand the early events of the Revolution, upon which he is able to report. Whilst there, he becomes friendly with Jonville de Montfleuri, a young aristocrat who is a supporter of the Revolution. Geraldine's tyrannical husband is eventually killed in France fighting on the side of the anti-Revolutionary forces, leaving Desmond and Geraldine free to

<sup>120</sup> Letter of 8 June 1791 to William Davies, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 34.

<sup>121</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *A Farewell, for Two Years, to England. A Poem*, in *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790*, ed. by Fraistat and Lanser (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), pp. 207-12, line 66.

<sup>122</sup> Jacqueline Labbe, 'Gentility in Distress: A New Letter by Charlotte Smith (1749-1806)', *Wordsworth Circle*, 35 (2004), 91-3.

<sup>123</sup> Letter of 27 November 1791 to Lucy Hill Lowes, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 38. Stanton's editorial footnote gives further proof of Wordsworth's meeting with Smith in November 1791 and of her letter of introduction to Williams.

marry. In an idyllic novelistic resolution in England, they will be joined by Montfleuri, now married to Fanny Waverly, Geraldine's lively and intelligent sister.

As Antje Blank and Janet Todd have argued, Burke and many other polemicists used the letter form to give the impression that they were spontaneous and sincere in their convictions, although, like *Reflections*, the 'letters' might be crafted and sophisticated constructs.<sup>124</sup> The letter form also gave a sense of immediacy, and first-hand experience of events. These qualities of the epistolary form are exploited in Smith's novel because she places Desmond, Geraldine and Montfleuri as impartial eye-witnesses of Revolutionary events. All three are living in France at various points in the narrative, which covers the period from June 1790 to February 1792. They observe events at first-hand in the tradition of well-known supporters of the French Revolution such as Williams, Paine and Thomas Holcroft, all of whom travelled to France in the early Revolutionary period, as Nancy Johnson observes.<sup>125</sup> The accounts of Desmond, Geraldine and Montfleuri seem, therefore, to counteract any false reports of recent events, be they written or part of the general circulation of rumour which was fuelled by aristocratic émigrés seeking sanctuary in England. The letters of Desmond, Geraldine and Montfleuri are, according to Johnson, 'not mere fiction; they are meant to convey reliable information, quell fears, and assert the truth about revolutionary developments in the face of propagandist reports'.<sup>126</sup>

In the language of the eye-witness personal account, Desmond is thus able to discount Burke's account of events in the early Revolution, which, according to Desmond, is not based on first-hand observation and therefore has no integrity; Burke 'dresses up contradictions with the gaudy flowers of his luxuriant imagination, in one place, and in another, knowingly misrepresents facts' (p. 286). Smith, through

<sup>124</sup> *Desmond*, ed. by Antje Blank & Janet Todd, p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 72.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Desmond, voices the sentiments of some pamphlets written in response to *Reflections*, which, according to L.G. Mitchell, ‘harped endlessly upon the inaccuracy of its details and the overblown hyperbole of the style in which it was written’.<sup>127</sup> Desmond comments that ‘the sanguinary and ferocious democracy, the scenes of anarchy and confusion, which we have had so pathetically described and lamented, have no existence but in the malignant fabrications of those who have been paid for their misrepresentations’ (p. 43). Montfleuri, in a similarly dismissive tone, comments that ‘throughout the revolution, every circumstance has, on your side the water, been exaggerated, falsified, distorted, and misrepresented, to serve the purposes of party’ (p. 333). Geraldine travels to France under the duress of her tyrannical husband and writes from there to Fanny, giving a further picture of ‘the fierce and sanguinary democracy so pathetically lamented by Mr Burke!’, an ironic comment which comes at the end of a paragraph in which she describes the tranquillity and social harmony of a moonlit night in Rouen. Geraldine suggests that the general circulation of misleading stories about violent disorder originates with the aristocrats who had left France, ‘emigrants with whom I conversed at Brighthelmstone’ [Brighton], who claimed that France was ‘*en feu & en sang*’ (p. 256). Her explanation is in accord with Williams’s verdict that the tales of ‘crimes, assassinations, torture and death’ are ‘exaggerated stories which are carefully circulated by such of the aristocrats as have taken refuge in England’.<sup>128</sup>

The descriptions of concord which make up part of this letter address the difficulty of false reports in the same way as Williams does in the final letter of the first volume of *Letters* and use details from the latter’s enthusiastic accounts of life in Revolutionary France in the narrative as a whole. Williams’s influence on Smith has been recognised by critics, who have noted a relationship between *Desmond* and *Letters*. Mellor, whose critique concentrates on the influence of *Reflections*, mentions

<sup>127</sup> L.G. Mitchell, ed., ‘Introduction’, *Reflections*, p. viii.

<sup>128</sup> Williams, *Letters* (1790), p. 222.

but understates the influence of Williams with her comment that by adopting the epistolary format, Smith ‘also acknowledged the impact’ of Williams’s *Letters*.<sup>129</sup> Nicola Watson points to the ‘documentary’ nature of the letters, including the dating and reporting of actual events by characters as if at first-hand, which seems ‘designed to replicate the impact’ of Williams’ *Letters* and remarks on Smith’s reuse of the Du Fossé story, as do Angela Keane, Carrol Fry and Stuart Curran.<sup>130</sup> Keane suggests further that ‘sentimental Helen’ is ‘recast as Lionel Desmond’ and that Montfleuri’s family history, which he relates to Desmond, is ‘reminiscent’ of Williams’s story of the Du Fossés.<sup>131</sup> This connection is also made by Fry; as well as his general claim that ‘Smith’s and Williams’s political sentiments run parallel’, Fry points out similarities between the Du Fossé narrative and that of Montfleuri, who renounces his title and makes changes to an inherited estate in line with Revolutionary ideals.<sup>132</sup> Curran similarly connects the two narratives, remarking that Williams’ account of her visit to the Du Fossé estate after the Revolution and her observation of its new ‘democratic protocols’ provides the ‘prototype’ for the ‘similar restitution’ undertaken by Montfleuri (p. xi). The general critical consensus is that Williams’s use of the epistolary form and her treatment of the Du Fossé story are important influences upon Smith in this novel.

However, critics have not, to date, recognised the detailed closeness of Geraldine’s pictures of Revolutionary France to those of Williams. Writing to Fanny, Geraldine describes the attempt to paint in her letters an optimistic picture of Revolutionary France as an epistolary ‘excursion into the field of politics’. This is a place where she has ‘always been taught that women should never advance a step’, a sentiment which identifies her with Williams as well as Smith (p. 254). Smith is able to capitalise on Geraldine’s role as a heroine of sensibility so that during her brief spell as

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<sup>129</sup> Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 107.

<sup>130</sup> Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, p. 36.

<sup>131</sup> Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s*, p. 82.

<sup>132</sup> Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 70.

a polemicist, the latter can become a fictional Williams as well as an extension of Smith, temporarily sharing the sentimental radical discourse of *Letters*. Curran argues that Geraldine's descriptions of places suggest that Smith 'kept a travel journal' during her visit to France and 'transformed parts of it into her novel', citing several specific and accurate details of Geraldine's description of Meudon as examples (p. ix). However, descriptions of the kind which Curran connects to Smith's putative journal also connect her to Williams's text. The city of Rouen is a prominent location in *Letters* and it seems likely that Smith is influenced by Williams's descriptions of the place. For example, Williams observes that:

We had a most agreeable journey from Paris to Rouen, a hundred miles along the borders of the Seine, through a beautiful country, richly wooded, and finely diversified by hill and valley. [...] It is situated on the banks of the Seine, has a fine quay [...] is surrounded by fine boulevards, that form very beautiful walks. [...] The cathedral is a very magnificent edifice.<sup>133</sup>

Geraldine's comments contain some similarities in expression, as well as in the choice of detail and viewpoints:

The country is very fine around Rouen. Hills, resembling the high downs in Sussex, arise immediately around it, but the prospect from the summit of that to which the road led us, is infinitely more beautiful than any I ever saw. -- The Seine winding through a lovely vale of great extent, and the port of Rouen crowded with vessels -- the town and suburbs -- the old and magnificent cathedral [...] render it altogether such a view as I never saw equalled in England. (p. 252)

Geraldine later notices the moon's 'radiance on the silver bosom of the Seine' and paints a scene of music, dancing and the 'pleasure of a gay walk by moon-light after a hot day' (p. 256). Her evocation of life in the new France uses details of aural and visual harmony, as if she is expanding Williams's recollection later in *Letters* that 'the voice of

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<sup>133</sup>Williams, *Letters* (1790), Letter XIII, p. 96, Letter XIV, pp. 102-4.

joy resounded on the hill and in the valley' and her rejoicing in *Farewell to England* that 'new-born Freedom treads the banks of Seine'.<sup>134</sup>

As well as presenting a picture of social harmony, Geraldine acknowledges, as does Williams, that a price was paid in blood for freedom in the very early stages of the Revolution and like Williams, justifies that price within the rhetoric of sensibility. Williams laments the deaths of 'the first victims of popular fury' in the early days. Despite her pity, she writes:

If the French revolution should cost no further bloodshed, it must be allowed, notwithstanding a few shocking instances of public vengeance, that the liberty of twenty-four millions of people will have been purchased at a far cheaper rate than could ever have been expected from the former experience of the world.<sup>135</sup>

Geraldine similarly comments on another early event in the Revolution, the march to Versailles in October 1789, which resulted in violence and the forced return of the royal family to Paris:

When humanity drops her tears at the sad stories of those individuals who fell the victims of popular tumult so naturally excited, pity cannot throw over these transactions a veil thick enough to conceal the tremendous decree of justice [...] which will be seen in colours of blood. (pp. 253-4)

Geraldine's suggestion that natural justice is working in favour of the Revolution goes beyond Williams's pragmatic explanations into what Chris Jones has described as 'an extreme radical affirmation'.<sup>136</sup> The fictional voice of Geraldine is able to articulate an idea which would not be so readily expressed in print by Smith or even Williams in their own personas. An indication of the difficulties which might have ensued had Smith done so is to be found in a handwritten comment by Thomas Lowe at the end of Smith's letter to Lucy Hill Howes on 27 November 1791, in which he is 'disgusted' by

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Letter XXVI, p. 218; *A Farewell, for Two Years to England. A Poem*, Line 67.

<sup>135</sup> Williams, *Letters* (1790), Letter X, pp. 81-2.

<sup>136</sup> Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 164.



Smith's [spoken] comment that the Swiss Guards 'richly deserved' to be massacred, and reports that after this he never would 'see Charlotte'.<sup>137</sup>

In *Desmond*, the epistolary form contributes to the sophisticated and subtle interaction between the fictional and the journalistic, the imaginary and the real. Smith places the observations from both her own first-hand experiences and those of Williams into the mouth of a fictional character, with the polemical intention of contradicting what she perceives as the fictions which are being circulated by real people. In this way, the epistolary format is an effective tool in the delivery of Smith's politically radical agenda and an example of her experimentation with and development of the courtship novel genre.

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*Desmond's* most overt interaction with contemporary polemic can be seen, however, in the passages of informal political conversations, which are used by Smith to promote radical ideals and generate support for the French Revolution. Smith claims in the Preface to *Desmond* that it is the 'conversations' to which she has been a witness that largely inform the 'political passages' of the novel (p. 3). The female writer's stance as a 'witness' to and reporter of male-dominated conversations is a further method of side-stepping accusations of 'unfeminine' participation in the male domain of politics. Smith is able in a number of accounts of conversations between supporters and opponents of the new France, to be part of political debate, exploring the writings of political thinkers and promoting radical ideas under the guise of simply reporting what she has heard. The 'reported' nature of the political content as well as its positioning within the rhetoric of sensibility may explain its general acceptance by contemporary reviewers.<sup>138</sup> Even *The Critical Review*, a conservative periodical, was able to accept the political content, on

<sup>137</sup> Footnote to letter of 27 November 1791 to Lucy Hill Lowes, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 39.

<sup>138</sup> For contemporary reviews of *Desmond* see: *The Analytical Review*, 13 (August, 1792): 428-35; *The Critical Review*, 6 (September, 1792): 90-105; *The European Magazine and London Review*, 20 (July, 1792): 22-3; *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal*, 9 (December, 1792): 406-13.

the grounds that it was information: ‘the opportunities for modern fine ladies for information are so few, that every means of their obtaining it, incidentally, should be approved of’.<sup>139</sup> The reviewer, despite not sharing Smith’s political ‘sentiments’ and recognising that she gives a partial representation of the questions under discussion, saw her as the purveyor of observed events, which included political discussions. He did not, therefore, castigate her for moving outside acceptable female parameters.

Smith represents two types of political ‘conversation’. Firstly, there is the adversarial type, seen particularly in Desmond’s reported engagements with various supporters of the old order of society. Such ‘conversations’, which are better categorised as ‘debates’, include Desmond’s clashes with the young English aristocrats, Lord Newminster, Lord Fordingbridge and their supporters, and with Monfleuri’s uncle, Count D’Hauteville, an advocate of the *ancien régime* (pp. 26-32; 147-53; 86-93). Secondly there is the ‘conversation’ sustained throughout the novel in the correspondence between the enthusiastically radical Desmond and the more cautious Bethel, intellectual equals who bring reflective consideration to the issues at hand. Both types of conversation are couched in part in languages established by Burke and Paine in *Reflections* and *Rights of Man*, but although it is true that the diametrically opposed views of Burke and Paine were major foci and catalysts of political discussion at this time, *Desmond* is not merely a riposte to Burke nor a defence of Paine. Smith’s reported ‘conversations’ draw on material from a wider contemporary political discourse, including popular misrepresentations of political views, particularly those of Paine. This aspect of Smith’s interaction with the cut and thrust of discussion has not been fully acknowledged by critics who have concentrated on Smith’s debts to the major written polemical work of the period.

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<sup>139</sup> *The Critical Review*, 6 (September, 1792), p. 100.

Central to political discussion in the early 1790s is the preservation, reform or abolition of hierarchical society and the social and legal power which accompanied the patrilineal inheritance of property. For Burke, such a society ‘has the happy effect of following nature’, by which he means it mimics the structures of the patriarchal family and includes ‘an inheritable crown’ and ‘a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors’ in the same way as property is transmitted through family lines.<sup>140</sup> Diametrically opposed to *Reflections* is the first part of Paine’s *Rights of Man*. Paine works from the premise that ‘rights’ are of divine, rather than familial or ancestral origin and extend to everyone equally -- that is to say, to all men. Paine makes a root and branch attack on monarchy, aristocracy and the distribution of power which depends upon inheritance. Whereas Burke claims that we look ‘with respect to nobility’ and that ‘Nobility is a graceful ornament to the civil order’, Paine attacks the ‘monster Aristocracy’, listing six reasons for its abolition and suggesting that ‘Mr Burke, if he pleases, may write its epitaph’.<sup>141</sup>

An example of Smith’s use of reported adversarial debate to highlight these issues is a scene in which Desmond meets the ultra-conservative Lord Newminster, and four of the latter’s sycophantic supporters: General Wallingford, Mrs. Fairfax and her two daughters (pp. 26-33). Smith makes clear her views on the aristocracy in a satirical portrait of Lord Newminster, who feeds his dog on bread and butter with chocolate poured over it, saying, ‘I would rather all the old women in the country should fast for a month than that thou shouldest not have thy belly-full’(p. 27). His behaviour has, in its shadow, the real examples of starvation and dearth, contrasted with extremes of wealth, the unjust distribution which underpinned radical agitation for political reform. Desmond draws attention several times to Newminster’s political power, referring to him ironically as a ‘sapient member of our legislature’ (p. 27). Paine discourses at

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<sup>140</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 33.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 86, 139; Paine, *Rights of Man* I (1791), pp. 134-5.

length about the ‘unnatural unfitness in an aristocracy to be legislators for a nation’, arguments which Smith’s portrayal of Newminster reinforces through his manifest unsuitability for such a role.<sup>142</sup> Desmond uses the examples of Newminster’s role in the Upper House and Wallingford’s in the Lower to undermine the belief that the aristocracy were uniquely suited to be law-givers and to criticise the way in which the vested interests of the landed classes dominated the legislature. In an interesting twist, Newminster, as Desmond points out, is actually the son of a Mr Grantham, who had bought the title. Smith thus undermines one argument in favour of aristocratic rule -- namely that the aristocrat inherits the suitable qualities for rule because he is ennobled by his stock (pp. 31-2). Later in the novel she introduces bona fide aristocrats from ancient families, D’Hauteville and Fordingbridge, French and English, who are equally unsuitable as legislators, their inherited characteristics being in line with what Paine described as ‘the opposite of what is noble in man’.<sup>143</sup>

General Wallingford has news from France that titles have been abolished by ‘low wretches’, that Paris is now a scene of ‘vulgar triumph and popular anarchy’ and that ‘the splendour of that beautiful capital is gone: the glory of the *noblesse* is vanished forever’ (pp. 27, 29). Such sentiments are reminiscent, and meant to be reminiscent, of Burke’s comments on the scenes of popular uprising in Paris and his lament that ‘the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.’<sup>144</sup> Fears that power shifted from its exclusive base in the upper classes would result in social mayhem were part of general fears of the mob which Burke exploited in *Reflections*. Loyalist polemical writers linked these fears to what would happen should Paine’s doctrine of rights be realised, suggesting that power shared by all would inevitably bring chaos. For example, an anonymous article in *The Times*, published in 1791 and entitled ‘The Natural Rights of Man’, satirises Paine

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<sup>142</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man* I (1791), p. 134.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>144</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 76.

in an ironic list of the 'rights' to 'dethrone', 'murder', 'usurp', 'set on fire' and so on. It also suggests that to deny any power which one man has over another is to 'make no distinction as to property, and when one man wants money to force it out of another man's pocket, as highwaymen do'.<sup>145</sup> This was far from Paine's understanding of rights and the ways society would be reformed, but illustrates the way in which the contemporary debate, in which Smith took part, included popular perceptions and polemical misrepresentations of radical views.

Similar misrepresentations are made in the same conversation with Desmond by Mrs Fairfax and her daughter. Mrs Fairfax makes a connection between the taking of titles and robbery, remarking that the Revolutionaries might 'as well have robbed them of their property' and the latter that 'a title is as much a person's property as his estate' (pp. 28, 30). This idea is also part of the debate of the time, featuring, for example, in an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Remarks on Mr Paine's Pamphlet called The Rights of Man, in a Letter to a Friend* (1791), which examines at some length the reasons for assuming that the 'doctrine of equality in rank is founded upon principles which if pursued would conclude for equality in property'. The writer insists that the 'leveller of ranks' will automatically be the 'leveller of property'.<sup>146</sup> The prevalence of this common anxiety about the 'levelling' of society, which would include the removal of property from its owners, was important and widespread enough for Paine to attempt to correct and he tries later, in Part Two of *Rights of Man* (1792) to make it clear that this is not what he is advocating. He claims that although he has been accused of 'levelling', the only 'levelling' to be found is in the monarchical system, because all monarchs are on the same 'level'; they are given, obviously wrongly, the same authority and privilege irrespective of their mental capacities.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *The Times*, 8 July 1791, Issue 2070, col C, paragraph 2.

<sup>146</sup> Anonymous, *Remarks on Mr Paine's Pamphlet, called the Rights of Man, in a Letter to a Friend* (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1791), p. 46.

<sup>147</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, II (1792), p. 224.

The extended 'conversation', which is the correspondence of Bethel and Desmond, enables Smith to promote politically radical ideas with further sophistication. Correspondence between these two educated and thoughtful individuals can also incorporate arguments based on the philosophical roots of the political battles concerning the nature of government.

A good example of a section of correspondence in which both objectives are met is that in which Desmond writes to Bethel to thank him for the 'paquet of books' he has sent, which includes the recently published *Rights of Man* (pp. 144-53). According to Bethel, this 'now engrosses all the conversation of this country' (p. 137). The early part of Desmond's letter responds to Bethel's reports of the social advancement of Sir Robert Stamford. Smith, through Bethel, uses the Stamford story as a way of undermining the Burkean belief that the possessors of family wealth are the natural protectors of the nation. Bethel had told Desmond in an earlier letter that Stamford had originally been his solicitor, had gone into Parliament at the same time as Bethel, taking one of the two seats in Bethel's gift and was conscious of 'possessing those powers, which, in a corrupt government, are always easily bought'. 'Preferments and fortune crowded rapidly upon him' and he had become 'the confident of ministers and the companion of peers' (p. 21). Bethel had later distanced himself from Stamford and resigned his place in parliament and court. Stamford, however, continued to prosper and bought Linwell, one of the estates belonging to Geraldine's husband, Verney, who sold it to alleviate his debts.

The interconnection of Stamford and Verney has polemical implications, with the moral corruption of both men expressed in terms of their equally irresponsible treatment of the estate as a means of satisfying their own needs. Political and legal power is in a state of moral decay, symbolised firstly by the failure of Verney, a member of what Burke terms the 'natural landed interest of the country' to protect his

inherited wealth and estate.<sup>148</sup> Secondly, Stamford's acquisition of rank, wealth and power by ruthless cunning is possible because of the defectiveness of the existing system and the corruption of the aristocracy. Part of Bethel's previous letter to Desmond had lamented Stamford's vulgar 'improvements' to this estate, depredations driven by the need to use the land to supply 'the luxuries of the table' (p. 138). As Diana Bowstead has shown, Stamford's 'grotesque notion of husbandry' is one example of the trope of gourmandising and the gratification of appetite whereby Smith represents the corruption of both individuals and the power structures of England.<sup>149</sup> For Smith, the Linwell estate represents the state of the British constitution, betrayed by the hereditary landed classes and plundered by the *nouveaux riches*.

As well as attacking Burke's political defence of this system, Smith also undermines his self-promotion as its moral guardian by choosing the name Verney for Geraldine's profligate husband. Although her intention is not obviously apparent to modern readers or hitherto noted by critics, it seems likely that Smith is playing on contemporary knowledge of the fact that the seat of Wendover, by which Burke first entered parliament in 1765, was given to him by Earl Verney, one of the largest landowners in Buckinghamshire. The Verney name is a way of reminding readers of Burke's own involvement in what radicals would perceive as the corrupt mixture of money, rank and political advancement which underpinned the status quo. According to Patrick Woodland, Verney is said to have 'ultimately squandered [his] wealth through injudicious business dealings, and an absurd generosity that also destroyed his parliamentary interest'. Verney eventually reached a state of financial desperation and

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<sup>148</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 44.

<sup>149</sup> Diana Bowstead, 'Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*: The Epistolary Novel as Ideological Argument', in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, ed. by M.A. Schofield and C. Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp. 237-63 (pp. 242-4).

tried to recoup money from his debtors. These included Burke, whom Verney tried to sue in Chancery for the return of a £6000 loan.<sup>150</sup>

In his letter to Bethel, Desmond moves on to contrast images of moral corruption with the possibility of a better society, applauding the ‘truths’ contained in *Rights of Man* and decrying the ‘clamour and abuse’ which the publication has excited (p. 146). He distinguishes between ‘sound argument’ and the ‘abusive declamation’ which is substituted for it by Paine’s critics. The two types of response are contrasted in the comments on Paine made by Desmond and by Lord Fordingbridge.

By way of sound argument, Desmond remarks that in a previous letter he had argued the case for *Rights of Man*. Here he had ‘cited against Burke a sentence of Locke, which contradicts as forcibly as Paine has contradicted one of his most absurd positions’ (p. 146). Desmond had argued that Burke’s ‘well-dressed absurdities’ reminded him of ‘the arguments in favour of absolute power, brought by Sir Robert Filmer in that treatise of which Locke deigned to enter into a refutation’ (p. 128). Smith thus introduces a reminder of the scholarly and historical origins of the political debate about the relationship between the government and the governed. The ‘arguments’ in question are those contained in Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha* (1680) and John Locke’s *Two Treatises*, written between 1679 and 1683. Desmond cites passages from Locke’s contractarian opposition to the royalist, absolutist Filmer, centring on the debate over whether subjects had the right to withdraw support from one monarch and place it with another. The use of this material gives Desmond and Bethel the intellectual high ground and at the same time shows Smith’s knowledge and understanding of educated political discourse. It also introduces into the narrative arguments about the right to rebel against unjust government which, as will be later demonstrated, underpins the story of

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<sup>150</sup> For a detailed explanation of the political and financial connections between the Verney and Burke families, see Patrick Woodland, ‘Verney, Ralph, second Earl Verney (1714-1791)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, January 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28234>> [accessed 9 February 2010].



Geraldine's marriage.

The rational critique of Burke which characterises Desmond's correspondence with Bethel is contrasted with Lord Fordingbridge's simplistic and irrational arguments, which Desmond also describes in this letter. Desmond is recovering his health in Switzerland, after a duel fought to extricate Waverly from an unwise engagement. Here, he informs Bethel, he had encountered Lord Fordingbridge, an arrogant youth about to take up his seat in the Lords, and Cranbourne, a lawyer who had accompanied him on his *Grand Tour*. Desmond relates the discussion which ensued, in which Fordingbridge, in a 'warm eulogium on Mr Burke', asserted that the theory of 'rights' is a 'wretched and dangerous doctrine' and that the 'common people, the mob' were born simply to work. 'They have no rights -- they can have none, but to labour for their superiors', is Fordingbridge's conclusion (pp. 147-8). Fordingbridge's comments are less sophisticated in expression but similar in principle to those which can be found in loyalist pamphlets and which were obviously also part of spoken discourse. For example, in an anonymous pamphlet of 1791, which attacks Paine's notion of universal rights, the writer claims that 'the rights of man are as different as those of situations' and that 'the rights of the peasantry are to a comfortable subsistence, and the means of rearing and supporting a hardy and laborious family. All beyond this does them an injury.' On the other hand, the rights of the proprietors of land are 'to the fruits of those lands after the maintenance of the peasantry, mechanics, artists &c. which are employed on them'.<sup>151</sup>

Smith's sophisticated manipulation of the epistolary form, whereby protagonist-correspondents report on political conversations, distances her at two removes from the

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<sup>151</sup> Anonymous, *A Defence of the Constitution of England against the Libels that Have Been Lately Published on It; Particularly in Paine's Pamphlet on the Rights of Man* (London: R. Baldwin, 1791), p. 54.

position of author as polemicist in the public sphere. At the same time, the choice of format enables her to make a strong case for the radical reform of society based upon principles for which radical polemicists praised the French and which they hoped would bring improvement to English society.

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Alan Sinfield has argued that 'dissidence' operates necessarily with reference to dominant structures.<sup>152</sup> This process is apparent in *Desmond*; the dissident, politically radical ideals expressed through the sentiments of the protagonists and through the passages of debate are at odds with the endorsement of the institutions of marriage, patriarchal family and landed property, politically dominant ideologies, which, typically, underpin the resolutions of courtship novels.

The ensuing tension is evident in the telling of the story of Geraldine. Her expressed Revolutionary political sentiments are at odds with her meek obedience to the rule of a corrupt and despotic husband, inviting the question of whether, just as the French were justified in rebelling against injustice, married women should rebel against tyrannical marriages. Moreover, the depiction of her marital misfortunes, which questions, tests and explores the inadequacies of the institution of marriage is at odds with her removal in the novel's resolution to the haven of marital harmony at Desmond's landed estate of Sedgewood, which he describes in the novel's final chapter:

Dare I trust myself with the rapturous hope, that on the return of this month, in the next year, Geraldine will bear *my* name -- will be the directress of *my* family -- will be my friend -- mistress -- my wife! -- I set before me these scenes [...] I see the beloved group assembled at Sedgewood: -- My Geraldine -- You, my dear Bethel -- your sweet Louisa -- my friend

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<sup>152</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 47.

Montfleuri, and his Fanny. -- I imagine the delight of living in that tender confidence of mutual affection, which only such a circle of friends can taste. (p. 335)

The paralleling of a story of domestic oppression in marriage with the French revolt against despotic power is a technique of Smith's noted by modern critics, such as Diana Bowstead, Stuart Curran, Loraine Fletcher and Amy Garnai.<sup>153</sup> An example of Smith's application of Revolutionary ideals to the problems of women's thralldom in tyrannical marriage is Desmond's expression of anger at Geraldine's mother's insistence that she should obey Verney's command to travel to France under the so-called 'protection' of the Duc de Romagnecourt (p. 223). Desmond writes of his dread that these 'ideas of obedience to her odious mother, and her worthless husband' will lead her into 'the very abyss of wretchedness'. Using the language of radical politics, he voices the hope that the proposal will 'rouse that proper spirit of resistance against usurped and abused authority' (p. 224). Smith draws further attention to the parallel with the injustices served on Geraldine as both a daughter and a wife when the latter identifies herself with the French Revolutionaries. About to journey into Revolutionary France, Geraldine puts the rhetorical question to Bethel:

If I get among the wildest collection of those people whose ferocity arises not from their present liberty but from their recent bondage, is it possible that they will injure *me*, who am myself a miserable slave, returning with trembling and reluctant steps, to put on the most dreadful of fetters? (p. 233)

However, even in her identification with the Parisian mob, she is, as Nicola Watson has remarked, depicted as emphasising and paralleling their suffering 'rather than exploring the possibility of analogous rebellion'.<sup>154</sup> Her sense of wifely duty extends even to the point of going to Verney on his death-bed, where he is able in his dying moments to dictate to Desmond 'a memorandum', in which he left his wife and

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<sup>153</sup> Bowstead, 'Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*', p. 237; *Desmond*, ed. by Stuart Curran, p. xiii; Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 146; Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings*, p. 18.

<sup>154</sup> Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*, p. 37.

children to Desmond's care (p. 329). Geraldine is again being passed like a piece of property to a man, albeit a better marital prospect than Verney. The impression of male ownership is reinforced by Desmond's depiction in the resolution of the 'beloved' group at Sedgewood, which includes 'My Geraldine' who will 'bear *my* name -- will be the directress of *my* family -- my mistress -- my wife' (p. 335).

Smith addresses further, with ingenuity and subtlety, the issue of female victimisation in marriage and its relationship to Revolutionary ideals by paralleling the stories of Geraldine and Josephine de Boisbelle, her French alter ego. Like Geraldine, Josephine has been 'married against her inclination' (p. 331). Like Geraldine her 'ill-assorted marriage' has 'put her into the power of a man altogether unworthy of her' (p. 63). With appropriate symbolism, both husbands fight on the side of the counter-Revolutionary forces and Josephine's husband has 'not been heard of since the night in which Verney received the wound that cost him his life' (p. 332). Both stories, to this point, serve to undermine any sense that marriage can be a refuge or reward for women. Unlike heroines of the Evelina or Emmeline type, for Geraldine, marriage brings suffering as Smith extends the critique which she had earlier pursued through the likes of Mrs Stafford and Lady Adelina. Now, however, in an innovative and challenging way, the critique is centred upon the heroine rather than confined to the subsidiary characters. Geraldine is, until his death, under the marital protection of Verney, a gambler and sexual dissolute, who abandons her and their three children and tries to 'sell' her to the Duc de Romagnecourt to help settle his debts. Smith offers only two choices for Geraldine and Josephine; loyalty to a cruel and dissolute husband or emotional and sexual fulfilment in the arms of a lover. The first choice brings physical dangers, emotional distress and degradation, the path taken by Geraldine; the second brings the legal and social problems which, ultimately, are experienced by Josephine. Such images of marriage and the limitations of female choice bring Smith's marriage

critique to a point of stasis and, arguably, are not eradicated from the mind of the reader, even when the whole is resolved conventionally in marriage.

Unlike Geraldine, Josephine has a love affair with Desmond and bears a child, behaviour which is punished in a way which reinforces traditional expectations of the behaviour of women. Josephine is held responsible and holds herself responsible for her 'indiscreet attachment' which in the resolution is perceived as a problem, together with the child which is legally the property of its father and handed over to the care of Geraldine, his future wife. Josephine is allowed only the hope that 'it is probable that her first attachment' [to Montfleuri's relation, de Rivemont] 'will end in marriage,' but not before he has been told the full facts about Josephine's misdemeanours by Montfleuri, who will 'never deceive him as to what has happened in his absence' (p. 332). Josephine must take her chances with the generosity of a man who might marry her despite her misbehaviour.

Smith's treatment of marriage in this novel has been the subject of much modern critical interest. The uniting aspect of such criticism is the acknowledgement that Josephine is a disturbing presence within the novel, and conversely, a disturbing absence from it, never, as Mellor notes, permitted to author a letter or to speak directly in her own voice.<sup>155</sup> Keane refers to the undercutting of the resolution by 'the silence that haunts the text [...] the unrepresented voice' of Josephine.<sup>156</sup> Bowstead argues similarly that Josephine's 'bitter lot is a nagging reminder that all such stories need not end as the conventions of sentimental fiction dictate'.<sup>157</sup> For Eleanor Ty, Josephine's is a 'background' or 'other' voice, like that of Lady Adelina in *Emmeline*, which disrupts the 'sanctity and acceptability of the foregrounded story'.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 118.

<sup>156</sup> Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, p. 86.

<sup>157</sup> Bowstead, 'Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*', p. 253.

<sup>158</sup> Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, p. 142.

The degree of interest, particularly in the doubled narrative of Geraldine and Josephine, and the various possible effects of Smith's techniques are themselves indicative of the subtlety of the treatment of the marriage plot.<sup>159</sup> I argue that Smith is skilful at presenting the dilemmas concerning female conduct within marriage and asking questions about the operation of the institution in her own society. Ultimately, at one level, the questions seem to be answered in the resolution by the arrival of the heroine in the safety of marriage to a land-owning man of rank, the conventional reward of conventional virtue. However, the possibilities raised in the interim create a disturbing sense of the inadequacy of those patriarchal assumptions which underpin this resolution. The dissatisfaction with these assumptions, which is already apparent in Smith's pre-Revolutionary novels, in *Desmond* has become inflected with political radicalism, producing greater tension between Smith's political beliefs and the conventional paradigm of the courtship novel.

However, Smith's increasingly radical critique of marriage is only one aspect of the way in which her political beliefs are at odds with novelistic convention. Her radicalism is in conflict also with the associated ideology of landed property, that is to say, the use of an inherited noble house with its landed estate, as an image of security and continuity. Therefore tension is evident in her efforts to present Montfleuri, a French aristocrat, and Desmond, the rich and socially privileged hero, as supporters of Revolutionary ideals and simultaneously to present them as estate-owners, particularly in a resolution which reinforces the right to power of a small, privileged group and their continued enjoyment of property. The radical credentials of Montfleuri, who has given

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<sup>159</sup> For further commentaries on the marriage critique, see, for example: *Desmond*, ed. by Antje Blank and Janet Todd, pp. 29-33; W. Austin Flanders, 'An Example of the Impact of the French Revolution on the English Novel: Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*', in *The Western Pennsylvania Symposium on World Literatures, Selected Proceedings: 1974-1991*, ed. by Carla Lucente (Greensburg: Eadmer, 1993), pp. 145-50 (pp. 146-7); Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, pp. 163-4; E. Wikborg, 'Political Discourse Versus Sentimental Romance: Ideology and Genre in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*', *English Studies*, 6 (1997), 522-31.

up his title, are established by lengthy discussions with Desmond on the iniquities of the *ancien régime* and the virtues of the Revolution (pp. 46-61). Smith reinforces these credentials partly through the contrasted and caricatured figure of his uncle, the reactionary Comte d'Hauteville and partly by giving Montfleuri connections with America, a symbol of Paineite rights and freedoms. His father had died in America and Montfleuri had served as an ensign during the War of Independence, revisiting the country two years before the action of the novel begins (pp. 47, 59).

Smith also attempts to use Montfleuri's reforms to his estate as a measure of his radicalism. In a letter to Bethel, Desmond describes these reforms, making clear that these are part of Montfleuri's embrace of the political principles of the Revolution since he 'occupied in softening the harsh features of that *system of government, to which only the poverty and misery of such a country as this could, at any time, be owing*' [Smith's italics] (p. 65). This is an attempt to show that Montfleuri is narrowing the gulf between rich and poor, high and low rank, in the management of his affairs; a practical demonstration of Revolutionary principles. Further evidence is Desmond's claim that Montfleuri's improvements to his chateau bring it 'as nearly as he could, into the form of one of those houses which men of a thousand or twelve hundred a year inhabit in England' and 'as nearly as possible to those plans of comfort and convenience which were followed in England' (pp. 65, 67).

The intention is to show that Montfleuri is rejecting the excessive riches of the French aristocracy in favour of a more modest way of life. However, even if he were to be literally the recipient of such an income, this would still place him in the top 1%, when 50% of the population existed on an income of £45 per annum or less.<sup>160</sup> The reformed society represented by Montfleuri's income and living arrangements is still a

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<sup>160</sup> For details of distribution of income in the period, see: Douglas Hay and Nichols Rogers, *Eighteenth Century English Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 21; Copeland, *Women Writing About Money*, pp. 22-38.

grossly unequal one and not yet in line with that envisaged by Paine and his supporters. Although the first part of *Rights of Man* does not define, identify or foreground the ownership of 'property', that is to say wealth, estates and houses as a discrete issue, Paine's attack on monarchy, aristocracy and the distribution of power under hierarchical regimes involves issues of inheritance and ownership and implies the need to redress the gross failings of the existing system. In the second part of *Rights of Man*, published in February 1792, there is a detailed explanation and exploration of the question of the distribution of property. Paine devises practical schemes for the redistribution of wealth, with a reformation of the taxation system playing a central role. The beneficiaries of these proposals would be those classes below the level of the 'landed interest', the latter whom Paine designates the 'drones, a seraglio of males, who neither collect the honey nor form the hive, but exist only for lazy enjoyment'.<sup>161</sup> Although Montfleuri, by contrast, is active and involved with improving the lot of his dependents, the difficulty of equating radicalism with land-owning aristocrats is apparent in Smith's concentration upon the former's estate management.

A further example of the difficulty of presenting Montfleuri as an opponent of aristocratic power as well as a privileged and patriarchal land-owner is to be found in a passage of praise delivered by Desmond. The latter praises Montfleuri's refusal to allow those on his estate to be called 'dependents' since none 'capable of procuring their own subsistence are dependent'; they are instead referred to as 'neighbours' (p. 68). However, Desmond's praise for Montfleuri as a reformer has a tendency to place him back, after all, in the role of the patriarchal estate owner. For example, in the same letter, Desmond describes Montfleuri as a 'generous and considerate master' who has 'made it the business of his life to make his vassals and dependents content, by giving them all the advantages their condition will allow' (p. 67). Desmond even slips at one

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<sup>161</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, II (1792), p. 279.



point into the language of Burkean chivalry, with the claim that ‘the best and sincerest of all homage, the homage of grateful hearts’ would reward anyone following Montfleuri’s methods. The ‘dependents’ of Montfleuri would, moreover, ‘defend him at home or follow him into the field were there occasion for either’ (p. 68).

Desmond concludes his approving account of Montfleuri’s estate with an account of a ‘house of industry’ which Montfleuri has set up on the estate in the building of an ex-monastery. This institution anticipates Paine’s schemes in Part II of *Rights of Man* for state-maintained, non-punitive workhouses which would provide paid work for such of the destitute as would go there voluntarily.<sup>162</sup> In Montfleuri’s institution attendance is likewise voluntary. Because the institution is intended to cater for anyone who is unable to work because of age, infirmity or time of year, it offers work at making ‘coarse articles, useful to themselves, or in the culture of the estate’ (p. 70).

The descriptions of Montfleuri’s estate management illustrate well the way in which Smith’s radical agenda is in conflict with the conventional enthusiasm for property in the courtship novel; as well as Desmond’s admiration for Montfleuri’s reforms and management, there is also the overriding sense of a continued relationship between patriarch and dependents. Similarly, Desmond is also keen to dissociate himself from privilege and élitism, claiming that his ‘ancestors were never above the rank of plain country gentleman’ and that a few generations back they ‘lose even that dignity in a miller and a farmer’ (p. 87). He also prefers Sedgewood, his ‘small estate’, to the ‘larger and handsomer’ one, thus emphasising his modest frugality (p. 225). However, Desmond is still part of a very small élite, for he was ‘born heir to considerable estates’ and owns at least two houses (p. 89). Moreover, he is Eton-

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<sup>162</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, II, (1792), pp. 299-300.

educated and rich enough to set aside £5000 to pay Verney's debts in order to save Geraldine from becoming destitute.

The impression of the right to power of a small, privileged group living in inherited property is reinforced in the resolution of the novel. Bowstead claims that Smith intends in the third volume of the novel that her readers should see 'the merits of democratic government, the proper management of estates and the kind of arrangements that ought to exist between husbands and wives'.<sup>163</sup> The phrase which Bowstead ultimately accords the household is that it presents 'reasonably democratic principles', a far cry from the radical principles ostensibly espoused by the hero.<sup>164</sup> It can be argued that a dominant, patriarchal ideology reasserts itself in the resolution of the novel, so that Sedgewood becomes a model of a well-run estate inherited by a gentleman, with a female helpmeet under his authority. However, Smith's technical skill, demonstrated by her identification with Williams's epistolary discourse, the use of passages of debate which address important political issues and utilise the language of contemporary polemic, and the equation of marriage to political despotism, enables her to promote a genuinely radical agenda even within the constraints of the conventions of the courtship novel. As Alan Sinfield has argued, 'Readers do not have to respect closures. [...] We can insist on our sense that the middle of such a text arouses expectations that exceed the closure'.<sup>165</sup> In the case of *Desmond*, this is clearly 'such a text' in which the pervading radicalism is not silenced, despite the removal of the fictional protagonists into the quiet restraints of Sedgewood.

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<sup>163</sup> Bowstead, 'Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*', p. 255.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>165</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 48.

## Chapter Four

### Chivalric Codes and Political Radicalism: *The Old Manor House* (1793)

*The Old Manor House* was completed in January 1793 and published in March 1793.<sup>166</sup>

It was written over a period of six months during a period of growing instability and violence in France and increasing government suppression of political radicalism in England.<sup>167</sup> In France, the monarchy was overthrown after an attack by a mob on the Tuileries Palace on 10 August 1792. This was followed by the bloodshed of the September Massacres in Paris in which a large number of royalist prisoners were killed by Revolutionary supporters. A republic was declared on 22 September 1792, and after a show-trial, Louis XVI was executed on 21 January 1793. In England there was, according to Philip Shaw, a deliberate attempt by the Pitt government and its supporters to counteract the influence of 'French principles' and to 'mobilise opinion against the French', with the result that by 1792, there was, in popular opinion, 'a detectable swing in favour of war against France'.<sup>168</sup> A major manifestation of government anxiety about the threat to the status quo from pro-Revolutionary ideals was the issuing of a royal proclamation against seditious writing in May 1792, under the terms of which Tom Paine was found guilty *in absentia* in December of that year.<sup>169</sup> Increased government surveillance of those likely to sympathise with and express radical ideas, coupled with such legal strictures, made it more difficult than had been the case with *Desmond*, for

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<sup>166</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House* (1793), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 6, ed. by Ina Ferris. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>167</sup> For details of the completion of *The Old Manor House*, see letters of 1 January 1793 and 6 February 1793 to Joseph Cooper Walker, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, pp. 53, 57, 59.

<sup>168</sup> Philip Shaw, 'Britain at War: The Historical Context', in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 51.

<sup>169</sup> See Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. by Mark Philp, pp. xii-xiii.

Smith in her next novel to question overtly the status quo in England and express support for radical ideals.

Nevertheless, it is clear that during the period of the novel's composition, Smith was still greatly engaged with radical politics and perceived by her contemporaries as such. As has been previously noted, in November 1792 she wrote to Joel Barlow, a prominent American radical, telling him of her pleasure in reading his *Advice to the Priveleged Orders*. She was, in the same month, toasted in Paris for her support of the French Revolution.<sup>170</sup>

Despite this perception of Smith on the part of Revolutionary sympathisers, contemporary reviewers did not castigate her for the expression of politically radical opinions in *The Old Manor House* or, for the most part, even express awareness of them. *The Critical Review* voices concern about the underlying principles which the narrative seems to espouse, but this concern is with moral rather than specifically political matters. 'What possible benefit can accrue to society and to youth in particular, from a perusal of scenes so repugnant to decorum and virtue?' the reviewer enquires. The story of the love affair and subsequent marriage between the hero Orlando and the penniless orphan Monimia is criticised for being 'an example for all young gentlemen of family and fortune to marry any pretty servant maid they choose'.<sup>171</sup> *The Monthly Review* does remark that 'Once or twice, but very sparingly, political ideas and opinions are introduced, and the author takes occasion to express that generous spirit of freedom, which is displayed more at large in her *Desmond*'.<sup>172</sup> The reference to this political comment is probably an acknowledgement of three footnotes added by Smith to the main text (pp. 298, 310). The most overtly political of these describes the 'barbarous' British policy in the American War of Independence whereby 'Indians' were enlisted to

<sup>170</sup> Details of letter to Barlow and subsequent events in Paris cited above, p. 4.

<sup>171</sup> *The Critical Review*, 8 (May, 1793), p. 52.

<sup>172</sup> *The Monthly Review*, 11 (June, 1793), p. 153.

help the struggle against the colonists. Smith claims that these 'exploits' exceeded the cruelty of the attack on the Tuileries, the September Massacres or 'any one period of the execrated Revolution in France'. There are, she suggests 'savages of all countries – even of our own' (p. 310).

It seems unlikely, however, that *all* readers of this novel, including its reviewers, were unaware of any other political content. Smith's situation has something in common with those writers from early modern England whose work has been described by Annabel Patterson. Patterson argues that it was possible for a writer living under an authoritarian regime to address 'the contentious issues of his day'; 'if he did *not* use the confrontational approach, he could encode his opinions so that nobody would be *required* to make an example of him'.<sup>173</sup> One of Smith's main preoccupations was probably to circumvent the anxiety of publishers, concerned about possible prosecution, who might be reluctant to publish material which smacked of Revolutionary sentiments. For example, even in 1792, when there was little need for caution, Cadell, the publisher of Smith's earlier novels, had refused to publish *Desmond* because she told him 'there were sketches of French affairs in it'.<sup>174</sup>

In *The Old Manor House* Smith therefore adopts a more oblique approach than in *Desmond*, avoiding its description of events of the Revolution and overt support for its principles. Using, as in previous novels, a story of inheritance and courtship, Smith questions and critiques the existing power structures of England. However, she encodes views which otherwise might be deemed dangerously political by placing them within a fictional time-frame of 1776-9. The time-frame is further complicated by the shadowing of the narrative with a distant imagined past of chivalrous enterprise, a world in which the reader half-imagines the action of the novel to be taking place, so strongly are the

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<sup>173</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 11.

<sup>174</sup> Letter of 5 January 1798 to Thomas Cadell, Jr. and William Davies, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 305.

‘chivalrous’ elements embedded. These are centred upon the hero, Orlando Somerive, who tries to live as if he is a knight in a chivalric romance. The use of this chivalric shadowing is the most important feature of Smith’s experimental and ingenious attempt to use the courtship genre as a vehicle for political radicalism.

Smith swiftly flags up the romance connection by using a quotation from Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (1516) on the novel’s frontispiece. As modern editors point out, the name of Ariosto was, in the eighteenth century, immediately identifiable with the genre of romance and that of Orlando with madness brought on by unrequited romantic passion.<sup>175</sup> The passion, forbidden although not unrequited, of Smith’s hero, Orlando, is inspired by Monimia, who lives in Rayland Hall under the autocratic rule of the aged owner, Mrs Rayland. Mrs Rayland is a proponent and representative of a hierarchical society which rejected change and drew its inspiration from the feudal past. She is an unmarried, childless woman who cannot pass on the estate through the usual system of primogeniture. Orlando, who is the grandson of Mrs Rayland’s impoverished and socially inferior cousin is encouraged by his family to believe that her favourable treatment of him means that she will bequeath him the house.

Orlando’s eventual inheritance of Rayland Hall and his courtship of and marriage to Monimia are intertwined with chivalric romance throughout the novel. Like Orlando, Monimia is named appropriately for the protagonist in a romance. Her ‘dramatic and uncommon name’, derived from Thomas Otway’s *The Orphan or; the Unhappy Marriage* (1680), was given by her great-aunt, Mrs Lennard, who was a companion to Mrs Rayland and brought Monimia to Rayland Hall when she was a child. Her choice of the name for her great-niece is ascribed to her having ‘had a considerable share of odd romantic whim in her composition’ (p. 10). Monimia’s early

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<sup>175</sup> *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Ina Ferris, p. 459; *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 36.

connection in the novel to the world of chivalric romance is established further by the reference to Mrs Lennard as the 'dragon' who guards her turret bedroom (p. 25).

Orlando begins a secret relationship with Monimia, which develops from childhood friendship into love in young adulthood. His self-identification with the chivalrous heroes of old makes him the butt of the mockery of his brother Philip, who sneeringly addresses him as 'Sir Roland' or 'Sir Knight' (p. 179). Even his friend Warwick enjoys teasing him for being the 'most fortunate and valorous Orlando of the enchanted castle' courting 'the sweet nymph of the enchanted tower' (pp. 282, 280). Orlando regards Monimia's plight, that of an orphan acting as a servant to the whims of two unpleasant older women, through the lens of chivalric romance, although this is disturbed from the outset by the intrusion of reality:

Her imprisonment, the harshness of her aunt towards her, and her desolate situation, contributed to raise in his heart all that the most tender pity could add to the ardency of a first passion.

Naturally of a warm and sanguine temper, the sort of reading he had lately pursued, his situation, his very name, all added something to the romantic enthusiasm of his character; but in the midst of the fairy dreams which he indulged, reason too often stepped in to poison his enjoyments, and represented to him, that he was without fortune, and without possession -- that far from seeing at present any probability of ever being able to offer an establishment to the unfortunate Monimia, he had to procure one for himself. (p. 20)

Orlando's imaginary world of chivalric enterprise is also extended outside the narrow confines of Rayland Hall into the battlefields of the American War of Independence. Orlando enlists and goes to America, returning home as a penniless mendicant in the latter part of the novel after escaping from captivity there. The choice of the military profession as a way of making financially possible a marriage to Monimia is the only one acceptable to Orlando, as he is a younger son with no wish to go into the law or church and an even greater unwillingness to go into the wine trade with his uncle.

Orlando's idealistic and chivalric image of war makes him open to Mrs Rayland's encouragement to become a soldier. For Mrs Rayland, 'the age of chivalry did not seem to be passed; for she appeared to consider Orlando as a Damoisell [a young man of gentle birth, not yet made a knight], now about to make his first essay in arms' (pp. 216-7). Jacqueline Labbe argues that the unusual spelling of the archaic expression, which was more usually spelled 'damoiseau', not only 'indicates Mrs Rayland's attachment to the feudal system, but also threatens to make Orlando over in Mrs Rayland's image: that is, transform him into a "damsel"''.<sup>176</sup>

The romance roles of firstly, the gentlemanly protector of a passive vulnerable female and secondly, the valiant knight-at-arms, do not work in the way which Orlando hopes. Monimia's escape from virtual imprisonment in the Hall occurs when Orlando is in America and is engineered mainly through a series of plot coincidences and the intervention of other people rather than through rescue by a knightly protector. After Mrs Rayland dies, Mrs Lennard tries to force Monimia into a marriage with the libertine Sir John Belgrave, a fate from which she escapes through the gratuitous kindness of several individuals, both male and female. Orlando eventually finds her not as a result of his own chivalrous enterprise but by chance, and even after their marriage Monimia does not enjoy the benefits of knightly protection but endures a life of poverty in which she works in secret, taking in sewing as a way of supplementing their meagre income without damaging Orlando's pride (p. 424). Orlando later reflects on the 'impossibility he found of sheltering his adored creature from the evils of indigence; and that the romantic theory, of sacrificing every consideration to love, produced, in the practice, only the painful consciousness of having injured its object' (p. 443).

The glory attached to military bravado in the romance tradition is similarly presented in polarised contrast to reality. Orlando's soldiering experiences in America

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<sup>176</sup> Jacqueline Labbe, editorial footnote to *The Old Manor House*, p. 265.



counteract any notions of chivalric derring-do; Smith goes to lengths to describe the raw cruelty of military life and warfare. Even before embarkation, Orlando sees ‘with a mixture of wonder and disgust, the human tempest roar in which he was engaged and for the first time enquired of himself what all this was for?’ (pp. 297-8). Later, he tries to persuade himself that ‘it was for glory: he had been taught to love glory’ and he muses about its pursuit in the name of ‘the honour of the British name’ (p. 300). He also considers the blood-thirsty doings of monarchs and leaders and the way in which education gave approval to these actions to promulgate a set of false beliefs which underpinned the glorification and justification of war (p. 300). The whole American episode thus undermines Orlando’s anticipation that modern warfare can be equated with the image of a knight fighting within the context of chivalry.

The resolution of the novel, in which Orlando inherits Rayland Hall as the result of a bequest by Mrs Rayland, is not achieved by knightly enterprise but by a combination of luck and careful enquiry. He eventually finds Mrs Rayland’s last will, which has been concealed in the Hall by Mrs Lennard. The final discovery is couched in terms which are a reminder of Orlando’s devotion to the world of romance, despite the fact that a box containing the will is located by a posse of respectable citizens on the basis of already disclosed information:

The posse now proceeded to the place indicated [...], the constable, a most magisterial personage, marching by the side of Orlando, while Dawson and his friends followed, with candles in their hands; and as silently as they ascended the great stair-case, and traversed the long dark passages that led towards the apartment in question, Orlando could not, amid the anxiety of such a moment, help fancying that the scene resembled one of those so often met with in old romances and fairy tales, where the hero is by some supernatural means directed to a golden key, which opens an invisible drawer, where a hand or a head is found swimming in blood, which it is his business to restore to the enchanted owner. [...] On entering the closet, the tin box, covered with a green cloth was discovered. The key which Orlando possessed opened it,

and the casket was within it; which he unlocked, in the presence of all the persons present, and saw the important paper. (p. 452)

Thus the Hall passes to him by the mundane enforcement of a legally drawn-up will rather than through supernatural intervention, the final example of the discrepancy between Orlando's misguided investment in the conventions of romance and the workings of the real world.

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Some critics have suggested, convincingly, that the undermining of Orlando's beliefs in the values of chivalry in the American sections of the novel enables Smith to comment in a modern context on the futility of war and its mistaken justification in the name of national interest, although such a stance was in direct opposition to government efforts to drum up support for war with France. As Judith Davis Miller argues, Smith is able to 'make anti-war statements about the American Revolution that had obvious implications in 1792 for Britain, which was about to declare war against France'.<sup>177</sup> The American War can also be seen as an historical parallel in that it could be construed as an unjustified conflict undertaken and lost by England against a people struggling for freedom. A further implication is suggested by Janet Todd, who claims that, 'Although she presented only the American struggle for rights, Charlotte Smith insisted on making parallels with the French Revolution, while, even more provocatively, she ensured that no reader could finish her novel without concluding that there were many elements in British society that richly deserved a revolution as well.'<sup>178</sup> However, Todd also claims

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<sup>177</sup> Judith Davis Miller, 'The Politics of Truth and Deception', in *Rebellious Hearts*, ed. by Craciun and Lokke, pp. 344-5.

<sup>178</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Pandora, 1987), p. x. For further commentary on Smith's use of the American conflict for political ends see, for example: Miranda J. Burgess, 'Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House*', in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 122-30 (p.122); Carrol L. Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, pp. 92-4; *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe, p. 27; Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 167; Katherine M. Rogers,

that Smith pursues a socially radical agenda ‘while not entirely abandoning the escapist pleasure of romance’.<sup>179</sup> Todd does not specify whether the escapism is that of the reader or the writer, but in any case, the romance elements are not a side-line to the political content but are instead an integral part of it.

Some modern critics, in commentaries addressing the use of the romance elements in the novel as a whole rather than in the war episodes only, concentrate entirely on Smith’s ridicule and undermining of romance, particularly through the characterisation of Orlando. Such critics see Smith’s use of the genre as criticising the role of women within the genre itself and, by implication, within the society of her day. The assumption underlying such criticism, although not actually stated, seems to be that romance offers an extreme, polarised manifestation of a dominant ideology of the 1790s: that of a patriarchal society in which females are protected by and subservient to physically and mentally stronger males. For example, Joseph Bartolomeo argues:

Smith herself quite deliberately ridicules the constricting norms. Her parodic self-consciousness about the conventions of romance as they operate in the novel advances an implicit but potent critique of the ideology they support, one that objectifies women and celebrates female powerlessness.<sup>180</sup>

In support of this view, Bartolomeo makes a sustained attack on Orlando’s behaviour as a hero, categorising him as a ‘lazy, self-pitying hero’, living according to a pattern of passivity and dependence.<sup>181</sup> He even judges him unfavourably against the reprobate Philip Somerive and the irresponsible Captain Warwick, claiming that these characters ‘act as doubles against whose character and conduct we judge Orlando’s’. He argues that Orlando’s ‘stolid devotion to his family, to Monimia and to respectability

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‘Inhibitions on Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists: Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith’, *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 11 (1977), 63-78 (pp. 75-7); Barbara Tarling, “‘The Slight Skirmishing of a Novel Writer’: Charlotte Smith and the American War of Independence”, in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering and Chatto), pp. 71-86, (p. 82).

<sup>179</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Janet Todd, p. x.

<sup>180</sup> Joseph Bartolomeo, ‘The Subversion of Romance in *The Old Manor House*’, *Studies in English Literature*, 33 (1993), 645-57 (p. 647).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 654, 652.

seems wooden by comparison' with 'Philip's unrepentant cynicism and Warwick's cheerful acceptance of adversity'.<sup>182</sup>

Orlando's reputation as a hero is at its nadir in Bartolomeo's assessment, but other critics have also drawn attention to Orlando's shortcomings. Ina Ferris sees him as inept and inactive, with his 'curiously passive ways: being taken prisoner, falling unconscious, awaiting rescue'.<sup>183</sup> Jacqueline Labbe sees him as a more volatile character, and argues that he is 'constantly at the mercy of his emotional responses to situations: wild, frenzied, despairing, ineffectual'.<sup>184</sup> Labbe makes this comment in relation to her detailed exploration of the relationship between the inheritance plot and the romance elements in the novel, recognising and examining the complex interaction between the two and arguing that Smith undermines both the assumptions of romance and the unjust laws of inheritance which depend upon primogeniture.<sup>185</sup>

Despite Orlando's poor showing as a hero in the eyes of some critics, this view of his character is not unanimous. Katherine Rogers, for example, in a critique which does not examine him as a romance character, claims that 'he is gentle, considerate, ever mindful of his obligations to his family, willing to sacrifice his own interests or put aside his own concerns to help others [...] and we admire him accordingly'.<sup>186</sup> Neither critics who see only the shortcomings of Orlando, such as Bartolomeo, nor those who conversely, like Rogers, dwell on his virtues, recognise his contradictory functions, the subtlety of Smith's use of the character and her employment of polemical material. In fact, Orlando functions in the plot not only as the representative of an out-dated system of values, which Smith undermines, but also as the hero of a story of justly-earned inheritance, acquiring literally a landed property and metaphorically a place in the

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., pp. 648-9.

<sup>183</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Ina Ferris, p. xv.

<sup>184</sup> Smith, *The Old Manor House*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe, p. 56.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-26. See, also, Jacqueline Labbe, 'Metaphoricity and the Romance of Property in *The Old Manor House*', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 34 (2001), 216-31.

<sup>186</sup> Rogers, 'Inhibitions on Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists', p. 76.

power structures of England. As in her earlier work, Smith employs a traditional courtship novel resolution with the married hero and heroine retiring to the sanctuary of a noble house and estate. This is Rayland Hall, the 'Old Manor House' of the title, which, as Loraine Fletcher has convincingly argued, is an emblem of the English state and constitution.<sup>187</sup> Unless it is assumed that Smith is suggesting that England should be inherited by the unworthy, then Orlando needs also to be able to function as the hero of the courtship plot and as the worthy eventual owner of the landed estate. Smith achieves the difficult negotiation of these two contradictory roles for Orlando by drawing on the treatment of romance and chivalry in the political polemic of the period, a political discourse in which the values of chivalric romance were the subject of debate; the novel can be fully understood only in relation to this discourse.

Barbara Tarling has suggested that in the American section of the novel Smith 'deconstructs the sentimental romance of Burke's great hymn to chivalry'.<sup>188</sup> Arguably, however, the whole novel, not merely one section of it, should be seen as part of the discourse in which *Reflections* was a prime target for radical polemicists. Key polemical texts which explicitly critique the ethos of chivalry are Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791). However, the novel should also be read in relation to the rethinking and reinstatement of romance which had occurred during the latter part of the eighteenth century and which is partly reflected in the work of radicals such as William Godwin and Catharine Macaulay. At the same time as they rejected the social and political models which underpinned the genre, such writers also recognised its inherent attractiveness and the validity of some of the knightly virtues.

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<sup>187</sup> Loraine Fletcher, 'Charlotte Smith's Emblematic Castles', *Critical Survey*, 4 (1992), 3-8 (5-8).

<sup>188</sup> Barbara Tarling, "'The Slight Skirmishing of a Novel Writer'", p. 82.

A famous passage from *Reflections*, which was targeted by radical polemicists as epitomising the retrograde traditions of romance and their embodiment in the chivalric code, expresses Burke's disbelief that he had lived to see the treatment meted out to Marie Antoinette in the attack on Versailles on 6 October 1789:

Little did I dream [...] that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. -- But the age of chivalry is gone. -- That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize is gone. [...]

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly.<sup>189</sup>

In direct response, Wollstonecraft criticises the perpetuation of the ideals of romance and chivalry in the context of an attack on the system of property inheritance through primogeniture. She maintains that primogeniture is a 'barbarous feudal institution' which 'enables the older son to overpower talents and depress virtue' and that the system also encourages a loss of moral fibre in noble families and the growth of idleness and vice in 'the mass of society'. It should instead be the case that a man has the right to 'enjoy the acquisitions which his talents and industry have acquired; and to bequeath them to whom he chooses'. If this were so, then instead of idling their time away in dissipated pleasures such as gaming, men of property 'might nourish a virtuous ambition, and love might take the place of the gallantry which you [Burke], with

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<sup>189</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 76-7.

knightly fealty, venerate'.<sup>190</sup>

A further result of primogeniture is that girls in landed families are 'sacrificed to family convenience, or else marry to settle themselves in a superior rank'. Those in the latter category, instead of functioning as rational and socially responsible beings, encourage the attentions of the aforementioned young men, adorning themselves to encourage their lovers to 'extort the homage which it is gallant to pay'.<sup>191</sup>

Wollstonecraft takes up Burke's ironic comment about homage being 'all folly' and undermines the irony by pretending to take it at face value and agree with it:

'Undoubtedly; because such homage vitiates them, prevents their endeavouring to obtain solid personal merit; and, in short, makes those beings vain inconsiderate dolls'.<sup>192</sup> Shortly afterwards, Wollstonecraft again echoes the words of *Reflections*:

'Whether the glory of Europe is set, I shall not enquire; but probably the spirit of romance and chivalry is in the wane; and reason will gain by its extinction'. According to her, the word 'romantic' has 'one definition -- false, or rather artificial feelings'.

Romance 'destroys all simplicity; which, in works of taste, is but a synonymous word for truth'.<sup>193</sup>

Smith's fictionalisation of an already constructed paradigm in radical polemic which connects romance and property inheritance has not been noted by modern critics. Wollstonecraft argues, firstly that the unfair distribution of property according to primogeniture damages individuals and society as a whole; secondly that this leads to an unjust perception and treatment of women which is disguised in the garb of chivalry; thirdly that the ideals of romance are specious, artificial and an untrue version of reality. Primogeniture and romance are inextricably connected, part of the same flawed system and just as Wollstonecraft views them as such in polemic, so does Smith link them in

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<sup>190</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, p. 23.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

*The Old Manor House*, undermining the romance genre within the framework of a story about the inheritance of property. Not only does this novel illustrate through Orlando's adventures the artificiality, fictitious and misleading nature of romance, it gives also a prevailing impression that primogeniture traps and corrupts those who are within its grip. For example, Mr Somerive's two sons and his daughter are all adversely influenced. Philip's right, as oldest son, to inherit his father's estate has encouraged his dissipated life-style and meant that most of the modest wealth has already been squandered and this has affected the prospects of Orlando, who has the 'talents' and 'virtue' which he lacks.<sup>194</sup> Orlando, on the other hand, is favoured by Mrs Rayland as a possible heir and consequently spends much time in the Rayland Hall library, where he becomes immersed in the literature of romance and chivalry. Because of his love for Monimia and his wish to rescue her, he feels an earnest wish that 'the hopes his relations had sometimes encouraged might be realized and that some part of the great wealth of the Rayland family might be his' (p. 20). For much of the novel, he hovers in indecision waiting for this inheritance to come his way, both as a way of providing an establishment for himself and Monimia and as a way of helping his impoverished family. The effect of his involvement with the Rayland inheritance, together with a set of idealistic beliefs culled from the pages of romance read in the Rayland library, is to place him, for all his 'talents' and 'virtue', frequently in a state of confusion, indecision and turmoil.

Isabella, Orlando's sister, is an example of a girl who is encouraged by the system to be both a 'sacrifice to family convenience' and to 'marry above her rank'. The vivacious twenty-one year-old is wooed by the ludicrous General Tracy, a libertine in his sixties who has acquired a hair piece, false teeth and the appurtenances of gallantry. A marriage between Isabella and Tracy would mean that all the financial problems of

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<sup>194</sup> Wollstonecraft's expressions, cited above, p. 100.



the family would be solved. Isabella ultimately pulls out of the engagement and elopes with Tracy's nephew, the handsome young Captain Warwick, travelling to the American War with him after an acquaintance of a few days. Although this relationship is successful, the situation of Isabella is further validation of Wollstonecraft's presentation of the effects of primogeniture upon family and society as a whole.

If Smith's novel can be seen as fictionalising much of Wollstonecraft's critique of Burke, it can also be related to Paine's critique of Burke's lament for chivalry. Paine presents Burke as a modern Don Quixote, drawing upon a passage in *Reflections*, in which Burke argues that although 'liberty' in the abstract may be a virtue, it should not be granted to the French revolutionaries who are in the same category as madmen escaping from a cell. Burke writes that if he were to 'felicitate a madman' on the restoration of his 'natural rights' then he would be acting out 'the scene of the criminals condemned to the gallies, and their heroic deliverer, the metaphysic Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance'.<sup>195</sup> This reference to Don Quixote was seized upon by cartoonists, who ignored the fact that Burke had used it ironically. They used the image of the would-be 'knight', together with Burke's comments on chivalry, as a fruitful source of ridicule. A cartoon of 15 November 1790, for example, depicts Burke as 'The Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance Going to Extirpate the National Assembly'.<sup>196</sup> Burke is dressed in armour, carrying a shield labelled 'Shield of Aristocracy and Despotism', riding a donkey out of the doorway of the publisher of *Reflections*. Such a representation was one of many which portrayed Burke as Don Quixote, in which, according to L. G. Mitchell, he often appeared 'tilting at imaginary windmills, with sparks flying from his enfevered head'.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> L.G. Mitchell, ed., 'Introduction', *Reflections*, p. 8.

<sup>196</sup> Anonymous engraving (1790), repr. in Nicholas K. Robinson, *Edmund Burke: A Life in Caricature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp.114-5.

<sup>197</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. x.

For Paine, the idea of Burke as a latter-day Don Quixote defending the world of chivalry affords rich polemical pickings. Like the cartoonists, he uses the image of the knight as a symbol of misguided near-madness, a figure of fun to undermine Burke's credibility both as a political sage and as the defender of a hierarchical system which had its roots in the feudal past. He describes him as a man 'dramatically lamenting in a publication intended to be believed, that *'The age of chivalry is dead!'* and that, *'The unbought grace of life* (if anyone knows what that is), the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone!' All this, according to Paine, is 'because the Quixot age of chivalry nonsense is gone!' Burke 'has discovered a world of wind-mills, and his sorrows are, that there are no Quixots to attack them'.<sup>198</sup>

However, the figure of Don Quixote was an ambivalent and contested one in the period and Paine's was not the only way in which the character was viewed. The eighteenth-century had seen a process of rethinking of romance, as David Duff and Jacqueline Labbe have argued;<sup>199</sup> also, as Frans De Bruyn has maintained, attitudes to Don Quixote were changing during this period.<sup>200</sup>

Duff claims that by the middle of the century 'a new and more sympathetic attitude to romance had been gaining favour' and chivalry was no longer automatically seen as 'the ludicrous institution to which Cervantes had reduced it'.<sup>201</sup> Labbe examines in detail some important reassessments of the genre, including Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), arguing that Hurd, supported by other writers, 'reorients the romance as [...] a historical, recognisable and valid literary form'.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791), p. 100.

<sup>199</sup> David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Jacqueline Labbe, *The Romantic Paradox: Love, Violence and the Uses of Romance, 1760-1830* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>200</sup> Frans De Bruyn, 'Edmund Burke the Political Quixote: Romance, Chivalry and the Political Imagination', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 16 (2004), 693-733.

<sup>201</sup> Duff, *Romance and Revolution*, p. 10.

<sup>202</sup> Labbe, *The Romantic Paradox*, p. 19.

Duff argues also that radical polemicists recognised a danger in criticising chivalry, namely that by doing so one ran the risk of appearing to jettison the many admirable virtues which it upheld, such as ‘generosity and justice’, for example, which ‘would clearly merit a place in any theory of public or private virtue’.<sup>203</sup> Virtues in abstract, as it were, separated from the artificial and specious codes of behaviour in which they were couched in romance, should not be readily denigrated. Duff points out the ways in which some radical polemicists tried to circumvent the problem. One method is that adopted by Catharine Macaulay, who writes of the ideals of chivalry that ‘They were indeed a proper remedy to the evils arising from *ferocity, slavery, barbarism, and ignorance*’. She suggests, however, that in modern times they are detrimental: ‘Now, when the causes no longer exist which rendered them useful, we should rather think of *freeing* society from those evils inherent in those *false* notions of honour which they have given rise to’.<sup>204</sup>

A different approach which acknowledges the attractiveness of the chivalric code as well as its weaknesses is that of William Godwin, who claims in *Political Justice* that there was ‘a gallant kind of virtue’ which ‘seized the senses’ and which seemed to ‘communicate extensively, to young men of birth, the mixed and equivocal accomplishments of chivalry’.<sup>205</sup> Later, in his novel *Caleb Williams*, published in 1794, Godwin presents, through the character of Falkland, the interplay, in a man of fine character, between these attractive ideals and ‘things as they are’ in the England of the 1790s. Godwin separates the motives and the innate qualities of Falkland from chivalry as it is interpreted, applied and manifested in false codes of honour in modern society. He highlights the original qualities of Falkland, described by the steward, Collins as having an expression, ‘afterwards obliterated’ of ‘frankness, ingenuity, and unreserved,

<sup>203</sup> Duff, *Romance and Revolution*, p. 31.

<sup>204</sup> Catharine Macaulay, *Observations on the Reflections of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, on the Revolution in France* (London: C. Dilly, 1790), p. 54.

<sup>205</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (London: G.G. & J. Robinson, 1793), p. 467.

and a spirit of the most ardent enthusiasm'.<sup>206</sup> The distinction between the intentions of an ardent seeker after what is right and his betrayal by a false code of honour is reiterated in Caleb's final tribute to Falkland: 'A nobler spirit lived not among the sons of men' but 'thou imbibedst the poison of chivalry with thy earliest youth'. At the end of the novel, Caleb claims that in its present state, society is a 'rank and rotten soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows'.<sup>207</sup> Much later, in his own account of the writing of this novel, Godwin commented on his portrayal of Falkland:

[He was] originally endowed with a mighty store of amiable dispositions and virtues so that his being driven to the first act of murder should be judged worthy of the deepest regret, and should be seen in some measure to have arisen out of the virtues themselves. It was necessary to make him, so to speak, the tenant of an atmosphere of romance, so that every reader should feel prompted almost to worship him for his high qualities.<sup>208</sup>

The character of Don Quixote was, according to De Bruyn, by Burke's time 'undergoing a historic transformation that culminated in the Romantic period idealisation of the knight of La Mancha', so that the name 'Quixote' might be 'intended as a term of derision, but it could also be worn as a badge of honour'. Indeed, Burke's identification with Don Quixote was one that in some respects he 'came to accept and even actively to embrace'.<sup>209</sup> De Bruyn argues that there were a number of increasingly sophisticated critical readings of the character in the late eighteenth century which, 'while continuing to perceive a burlesque element in Cervantes' characterisation of the Don', also 'acknowledge a nobility in the knight's idealism and recognise that the reader's satirical laughter at Quixote reflects ironically on his or her own worldliness and compromising self-interest'.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>206</sup> William Godwin, *Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 12.

<sup>207</sup> *Caleb Williams*, pp. 336-7.

<sup>208</sup> Godwin, 'Preface' to the 1832 'Standard Novels' edition of *Fleetwood*, extract repr. in *Caleb Williams*, ed. by Hindle, p. 349.

<sup>209</sup> De Bruyn, 'Edmund Burke', pp. 698-9.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 707.

This complex discourse informs the characterisation of Orlando in *The Old Manor House* and helps Smith make the difficult negotiation between his roles as the misguided representative of romance and as the virtuous agent of political change. The figure of Don Quixote, the misguided, self-appointed knight of Cervantes' parody of the romance genre, shadows and enriches that of Orlando. Although different in age, Orlando is comparable to Don Quixote, with whom Smith deliberately connects him, in his mistaken but idealistic attempts to live by the conventions of chivalry in a modern age. For example, Orlando's father accuses him of a 'tendency to romantic quixotism' and Mr Stockton, the owner of the adjacent estate to Rayland Hall jokes about his 'dulcinea' (pp. 131, 128). The latter term is also applied in comical reference to the jealousy of the butler Pattenson that Betty, his own 'coquettish dulcinea', might be the object of the affections of a rival, namely Orlando (p. 154).

As we might view Don Quixote, so might we also view Orlando, for it is idealism which motivates his actions, his 'ingenuous and generous mind' informing his behaviour as a lover, a soldier and an heir to Rayland Hall (p. 64). Moreover, some of the virtues which the chivalric code promoted have their validity outside it and are not exclusive to it; for example, courage and a duty to protect the vulnerable, which are integral to Orlando's behaviour. Smith in fact invites the reader to 'acknowledge a nobility in the knight's idealism'.<sup>211</sup> Despite his shortcomings, Orlando is shown to exhibit from the outset good intentions and the desire to act according to principle. He is presented as a very young, unworldly man, whose idealistic view of life leads him into a mistaken view of the way things are. Nevertheless, his underlying goodness of heart enables him to act with principle, in contrast to most of those around him, and to maintain that stance as he learns through very hard experience the realities of life. His 'open unguarded temper, incapable of dissimulation and despising it wherever it

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<sup>211</sup> De Bruyn's phrase, used of Don Quixote and cited above, p. 106.

appeared' is in deliberate counterbalance to the worldly cunning and corruption of many other characters (p. 251).

His gentle, respectful courtship of Monimia is, for example, contrasted with the behaviour of other male characters. Sir John Belgrave, who initially accosts her in woodland outside the boundaries of Rayland Park, persists in his unwelcome and predatory interest. General Tracy is a more laughable womaniser, whose interest is in 'youth and beauty, of which he was continually in search', with the additional proviso that the women he pursued needed to be 'the indigent and the defenceless' so that there would be no remonstrance from fathers or brothers (p. 102). Captain Warwick, who marries Isabella and takes her with him to America, teases Orlando for his refusal to adopt the same course with Monimia. Both men and their wives are by this time safely in England, but both are in a sense 'disinherited', Warwick by Tracy and Orlando by Mrs Rayland, since he is not included in her apparently legal first will. Warwick remarks mockingly, 'It does not appear that thy piety has succeeded better than my rashness'. Orlando's response is that whatever his present circumstances, there is a consolation: 'I have never, to gratify myself, given pain to those who had a claim to my duty' (p. 438).

Two young men who do treat Monimia with respect are Newill, the son of the milliner with whom she is sent to work, and his friend Fleming, both of whom help Monimia to escape from the attentions of Belgrave. Tellingly, Fleming too is related to the ideals of romance. He organises Monimia's 'asylum' with his own mother, acting in a way which Monimia attributes to the fact that he had recollected 'not only his classics, but the romances which he had delighted in at school'. She claims that he saw in her 'a poor deserted heroine of a novel, and nothing could be in his opinion so urgent as my relief' (p. 419). This seems to be a reinstatement of what Smith has appeared to be rejecting, in that it seems to endorse the role of the chivalrous male as the protector of

the vulnerable female. It is perhaps a reflection both of the attractiveness of romance and of the ambivalence which pervaded critical and political treatment of it during this period. Moreover, it can be argued that in an unreformed world, where for the moment women are still at the mercy of the predatory and unprincipled, there is, after all, a place for the protective male and until such time as society is different, this will remain the case.

The sense of Orlando as a principled innocent with much to learn also informs his behaviour as a soldier. Smith reminds the reader of Orlando's worldly innocence when he is about to embark for America, commenting that he had 'never been from the Hall except for a few weeks, which were either passed in pleasure in London or a quiet country town' (p. 297). Despite this, however, he deals with the rigours and terrors of the voyage to America and those of battle with personal courage. He has the responsibility for many men and was 'so incessantly called upon to attend to his duty that he had hardly a moment to command but for repose and, occupied about others, could think but little of himself' (p. 298). When fever breaks out on the ship, the 'distresses of his men (whom in despite of the danger of infection he attended with paternal kindness)' take precedence over his own safety (p. 300). In a fierce storm, convinced that the ship is sinking and that his death is inevitable, rather than thinking of himself, he thinks of the effect 'on those infinitely dearer to him than himself' and is glad that 'he had not exposed his Monimia to difficulties and distresses, under which many around him had sunk: and in this self-congratulation he found the first reward of virtue' (p. 302).

In the Rayland inheritance story also, Orlando's striving to behave with moral integrity is sharply contrasted with the greedy machinations of other interested parties. Mrs Rayland's first will had left wealth and possessions to Mrs Lennard and the Hall and estate to the Dean and Chapter for charitable use. In a complex sequence of events,

both sets of beneficiaries conspire corruptly to protect their own interests. Mrs Lennard marries Roker, a corrupt young lawyer, who is later employed by the Dean, the ‘canting hypocrite’ Dr Hollyburn (p. 432). Roker’s brief is to defend the church’s right to ownership of Rayland Hall from a lawsuit brought by Philip Somerive, who thinks that he has the right to the estate as heir-at-law. Roker terrorises and imprisons his wife, forcing her to destroy what he thinks is the only copy of a second will by which Orlando inherits the estate.

In contrast, and from the outset, it is made clear that the favour of Mrs Rayland is not sought by Orlando and that he deploys no cunning to persuade her to leave him the estate. He was ‘of a temper which made it impossible for him to practise any of those arts by which the regard of such a woman could be secured’ and ‘the degree of favour he had obtained was long rather a misery than a pleasure to him’ (p. 8). Although the inheritance of the Hall would make it financially possible for him to marry Monimia, there is no suggestion that greed is part of the motivation, as is the case with the other inheritance seekers. He remarks to Monimia that ‘If I had a choice, it would be to pass all my life in some quiet retirement with you. We should not want either of us to be very rich, for we should certainly be very happy’ (p. 40).

The resolution of the novel makes a concession to the conventions of the courtship novel for when Mrs Rayland’s will is discovered, Smith has the terms of the will dictate that Orlando must take the name of Rayland, buy a baronetcy and that the estate will pass to his male heirs. However, the two young protagonists have earned by virtue the right to take possession of Rayland Hall and politically it is of great significance that the inheritance has not come about because of entitlement by primogeniture, rank or wealth. In contrast to her treatment of Emmeline and Celestina, Smith does not, for example, reveal a hitherto secret aristocratic ancestry for Monimia. She remains the penniless orphaned daughter of a father who was an attorney, ‘a kind of



steward' (p. 10). Like Emmeline and Celestina and like Orlando, Monimia also suffers physical and emotional hardship and deals with their rigours. Orlando also lacks any qualification through rank, being the product of at least two generations-worth of non-noble marriage. Both characters, for most of the novel, own nothing, as if Smith is deliberately placing them in a space diametrically opposite to that of the traditional inheritor of land. Monimia is a servant, treated with cruelty, and even when married works making goods for a linen warehouse; Orlando experiences war, illness and extreme poverty.

When they ultimately take over the running of the Hall -- and in a metaphorical sense are used as representatives of the virtue which ought to inherit a reformed England -- Smith resists a resolution which implies an acceptance of the political status quo. There is a sense that power should not be based upon the unjust workings of the old system and that the future of England must not remain in its grip. The answer to the question of who should be the heir to the wealth and power of Rayland Hall and, symbolically, who should wield power in England is that in both instances, worth should be the criterion; power should be in the hands of those whose qualities ensure the survival, prosperity and integrity of both the Hall and England, a radical rejection of Burkean beliefs about inheritance and rank.

## Chapter Five

### Revolutionary Violence and Political Ideals: *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794) and *The Banished Man* (1794)

It is likely that Smith started to write *The Wanderings of Warwick* in March 1793, immediately after the publication of *The Old Manor House*. She wrote a letter in that month requesting the loan of 'the History of Jamaica' because she was 'engag'd in a work' for which she needed this resource.<sup>212</sup> Published in January 1794, the novel is a single volume sequel to *The Old Manor House*, written to fulfil a contract she had with the publisher Joseph Bell.<sup>213</sup> Bell disagreed with her claim that she had completed the 'whole engagement', and states in the 'Advertisement' of the novel that instead of the two promised volumes he is actually publishing it in one volume, after a delay, and that this situation is 'imputable solely to the author' (p. 5).<sup>214</sup>

Smith's attention was not confined to *The Wanderings of Warwick* during the period of its writing. At the beginning of 1793 she was also composing the blank verse poem *The Emigrants*, which was published in May of that year.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, in October 1793, well before the completion of *The Wanderings of Warwick* in December 1793, she stated in a letter that she had started work 'on a Novel, which as fast as I write I get my daughters to copy'.<sup>216</sup> This novel was *The Banished Man*, which was published in August 1794.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Letter of 21 March 1793 to James Upton Tripp, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 63.

<sup>213</sup> Letter of 16 December 1793 to Thomas Cadell, Snr., in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 89.

<sup>214</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 7, ed. by M.O. Grenby. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>215</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Emigrants* (1793), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 14, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe, pp. 119-47.

<sup>216</sup> Letter of 9 October 1793 to Joseph Cooper Walker, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 79.

<sup>217</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Banished Man* (1794), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 7, ed. by M.O. Grenby. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

*The Wanderings of Warwick* takes up the story of Orlando's sister Isabella and his friend Captain Warwick, whose elopement is described in *The Old Manor House*. Their adventures as a married couple take them to a variety of locations, with the details of their wanderings presented via a manuscript which Warwick writes and then reads aloud during the couple's visit to Rayland Hall, of which Orlando and Monimia are now the resident owners. Warwick serves briefly with his regiment in the American War of Independence, but Smith pays scant attention to this episode and does not include the kind of reflection which characterises Orlando's military experience in *The Old Manor House*. Nor does she use it as a way of making comments about the validity of the war with France, which had been declared in February 1793. Instead, Warwick's account moves swiftly on so that within a chapter, he and Isabella are en route for England via the West Indies. Warwick describes their stay in Barbados and includes an account of his earlier experiences as a young soldier in Jamaica. Much of the remainder of the novel is occupied with the inset narrative of Warwick's Portuguese friend, Villanova -- a story of love, betrayal and death played out in Portugal and Spain. The final section of the novel is set in Scotland, where Warwick takes up writing and so gives Smith a brief opportunity to satirise the literary establishment.

The novel does not engage directly with those political topics which have been central to *Desmond* and *The Old Manor House* or with those which are foregrounded in the subsequent *The Banished Man*. Both *Desmond* and *The Banished Man* -- as well as the poem, *The Emigrants* -- deal with questions directly arising from events in France. Events of particular import in 1793 were the execution of Louis XVI, the state of war which existed in Europe, and the plight of aristocratic refugees from Revolutionary France, none of which are addressed in *The Wanderings of Warwick*. Neither does this novel demonstrate interaction with the polemical debate arising from Edmund Burke's endorsement of traditional society, as is the case with *The Old Manor House*.

*The Wanderings of Warwick*'s connection as a sequel to *The Old Manor House* is largely at the level of plot through the adventures of two characters, Isabella and Warwick. It does, however, display some connections to *The Banished Man*, taking up a preoccupation with wandering and exile first signalled in the original, discarded title of *Desmond, The Wandering Lover*.<sup>218</sup> *The Wanderings of Warwick* manifests this theme through the physical wanderings of the protagonists, who also, to a degree, wander from the conventional confines of the patriarchal family. In *The Banished Man*, on the other hand, the theme of wandering and banishment is used in a more profound way, linking politics to the form of the novel.

Another link between *The Wanderings of Warwick* and *The Banished Man* is that in both Smith increasingly, and increasingly overtly, distances herself from the conventions of courtship novels. With each succeeding novel, Smith displaces further the courtship plot and its endorsement of marriage, patriarchal family structures and the inheritance of property by right of birth. As we shall see, she is aware of this process and draws the reader's attention to it. In this respect, *The Wanderings of Warwick* can be seen less as a side-step from Smith's main political interests in this period and more as part of the political continuum of her career as a radical novelist.

*The Wanderings of Warwick* does address one area of particular political interest during the period; it addresses briefly the issue of slavery which was an important part of contemporary debate and can be seen as part of that wider discourse which A.A. Markley calls 'an awareness of the exploitation and disenfranchisement of other races', which 'begins to permeate reformist works in the 1790s'.<sup>219</sup> The question of slavery has been treated by a number of critics as the only, or the most important political issue of this novel and most connect Smith's treatment of it here with the later 'The Story of

<sup>218</sup> For further details of the choice of title for *Desmond*, see Amy Garnai, 'A Letter from Charlotte Smith to the Publisher George Robinson', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 19 (2007), pp. 391-6.

<sup>219</sup> A.A. Markley, *Conversion and Reform in the British Novel in the 1790s: A Revolution of Opinions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 20.

Henrietta' in the second volume of *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800).<sup>220</sup>

Warwick's account of his and Isabella's sojourn in Barbados allows Smith to address the issue of slavery. Warwick's reflections on the 'negro-slaves' in Barbados, who seem to be 'beings called into existence only to suffer', lead him to further contemplations. He recalls his life as a young soldier in Jamaica, where he 'beheld with wonder droves of black people going to the fields under the discipline of the whip' and retells a story related to him by a friend who had been engaged to a beautiful Creole girl but had broken the engagement when he saw her enjoying the brutal whipping of a young slave in her home (pp. 21-4). Warwick finds much to criticise in the treatment of slaves, but the criticism is muted, so that he can also remark that 'the subject seen nearer loses some of its horrors; though too many remain, and ever must remain, while slavery exists' and that 'dreadful as the condition of slavery is, the picture of its horrors is often overcharged' (pp. 21, 27). Moreover, the situation of the slaves is at one point compared to that of the English labouring classes, Warwick maintaining that the condition of the former is 'in some respects even preferable to that of the English poor' (p. 26).

This comparison makes it difficult to categorise Smith as primarily interested in the issue of slavery, since she seems to be understating and deflecting attention from the sufferings of slaves. Nor is it easy to categorise her as an abolitionist, as the main body of Warwick's comments is preceded by his 'purchase' of a mulatto woman to wait on Isabella, his behaviour contradicting the anti-slavery elements of his comments (p. 19). In short, as M.O. Grenby argues, although some critics, including Florence Hilbish and Carrol Fry, have claimed that Smith adopts a strongly anti-slavery line in her work, it is difficult to argue this case from the textual evidence in this work (pp. xiv-xvi). Even

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<sup>220</sup> See for example: Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, pp. 171-5; Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, pp. 96-100; *The Wanderings of Warwick*, ed. by Grenby, pp. xiv-xvi; Charlotte Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender and British Slavery, 1713-1833* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp.170-4, 180-1.

allowing for the fact that Warwick's views are not necessarily to be regarded as identical to Smith's, her insertion of a footnote commending a book which she has read since writing *The Old Manor House* -- 'Mr Edwards's *History of the British Colonies in the West Indies*' -- makes it difficult to argue that she is presenting an unequivocally hostile view of slavery (p. 28).<sup>221</sup> According to Loraine Fletcher, Edwards was a 'friend and former neighbour' of Smith's and was 'an advocate of slavery'.<sup>222</sup> George Boulukos argues that Edwards, a West Indian planter, 'positioned himself as a moderate' but believed that slavery in the West Indies was advantageous for Africans.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, the historian Christer Petley maintains that Edwards claimed that slaveholders had already begun to ameliorate their treatment of slaves and he used this as a way of arguing against abolition: 'He used his writing to defend slavery and the planters, and yet claimed to be opposed in principle to both the slave trade and slavery'.<sup>224</sup> Although at one point in the *History* Edwards claims that he is 'no friend to slavery, in any shape, or under any modification', there is a clear mismatch between this statement of belief and a section entitled: 'Objections to a direct and immediate abolition of the trade by the British Nation only', where he argues that 'such a measure will tend to aggravate, in a very high degree, the miseries of a great majority of the Negroes already in the West Indies'.<sup>225</sup> Later he describes ways of 'further meliorating' the conditions of slaves, but this amelioration is very slight, merely involving giving them sufficient rest time, the possibility of earning 'a little property or peculium' and setting up their own juries to try minor offences.<sup>226</sup>

Warwick's reflections on slavery as a whole are a mixture of reported events,

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<sup>221</sup> Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 2 vols (London: John Stockdale, 1793).

<sup>222</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, pp. 64, 70.

<sup>223</sup> George E. Boulukos, 'Maria Edgeworth's "Grateful Negro" and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 23 (1999), 12-29 (p. 6).

<sup>224</sup> Christer Petley, 'British Links and the West Indian proslavery argument', *History in Focus*, 12 Slavery (2007), <<http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Slavery/articles/petley.html>> [accessed 16/04/2011].

<sup>225</sup> Edwards, *History*, vol. II, pp. 146, 100-24, 112.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

emotional reactions, moral statements and internal debate. Together with Smith's ambivalent authorial attitude to the slavery issue they can be seen in terms of what Adriana Craciun terms a 'series of framed counterpoints' in the 'abolition debates'.<sup>227</sup> Craciun also juxtaposes Smith's presentation of the slavery issue in her fiction with her later identification of marriage with the institution of slavery, made in a letter written in 1800, in which Smith's own marriage is presented as bondage from which she will personally be released when the legal dispute over her father-in-law's will is settled. Ironically, this eventually came only after the sale of a Barbados plantation, which depended upon slave labour.<sup>228</sup>

In *The Wanderings of Warwick* Smith refuses to confine her protagonists within courtship novel conventions and continues the unsettling which characterises her previous novels. This novel's resolution does not provide marriage and a landed estate since for the protagonists, Isabella and Warwick, these are in place at its beginning. Warwick has already inherited General Tracy's estate, is married to Isabella and is the father of two sons. This unconventional novelistic treatment of marriage is deliberately highlighted in the course of Warwick's narrative. He remarks to his listeners, 'you must divest yourself of the consciousness of the happy catastrophe' and 'when once we are sure people will be happy, we no longer feel any interest for them; and therefore all novels, or at least most of them, close with a marriage, with which mine must set out' (p. 9).

The inset narrative of Warwick's Portuguese friend Villanova and Xaviera, the woman Villanova loves, does relate a courtship story which proceeds along a conventional time-line, with love initially thwarted by intervention by unjust authority. However, it spectacularly refuses to close with a happy catastrophe. Villanova, when he was not even seventeen years old and Xaviera, his cousin, who was 'even younger', had

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<sup>227</sup> Craciun, *British Women Writers*, p. 172.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

originally been 'intended' to marry. However, because her three brothers had died, she had become the richest heiress in Portugal and was therefore 'given' to Villanova's older brother. Xaviera later became a 'decided coquet' and wanted to 'try how far the power of her charms could conquer the principles of honour and the ties of kindred' (p. 50). The story develops into a melodramatic account of her husband's death at the hand of her lover, her temporary incarceration in a convent, her release and Villanova's jealousy and suicide when she continues her relationship with her lover rather than marrying Villanova.

This strange narrative was regarded by *The Monthly Review* as a cautionary tale about jealousy in marriage.<sup>229</sup> However, it can be read also as exemplifying the abusive control and ownership of women under the aegis of protective patriarchy and as further evidence of Smith's questioning of the moral and social validity of conventional mores. By displaying the working of patriarchy within the context of the religious and social authoritarianism of Catholic Portugal and Spain, thus presenting an extreme manifestation of its faults, Smith delineates sharply the faults in the ideology.

The innovative nature of Smith's use of narrative form in this and other novels has been noted by several modern critics, although their focus is on her use of narrative voice rather than her unsettling of the conventional plot.<sup>230</sup> Of greater significance for Smith's development as a political novelist is the way in which she not only undermines conventional plot outcomes in the action of the novel, but also draws attention to their artificiality and fictionality and, by implication, suggests that the values which they espouse are out of kilter with real life and the needs of an unreformed society. Such ironic distancing from her fictional creation, together with a self-conscious distinction between her personal experience and the values endorsed by the conventions of the

<sup>229</sup> *The Monthly Review*, 14 (May, 1794), p. 113.

<sup>230</sup> See, for example: A.A. Markley, 'Charlotte Smith, the Godwin Circle, and the Proliferation of Speakers in *The Young Philosopher*', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), pp. 87-99 (p. 94); Caroline Franklin, 'Introduction' to facsimile edition of *The Wanderings of Warwick* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1992), p. xi.



novels she needs to sell, is a technique which shows Smith's contempt for the requirement to depict a version of society which is at odds with what she perceives as the truth. Moreover, the idea that published fiction is itself restrained by conventions and power bases outside the control of the author, which is articulated in the final section of the novel, adds to this impression of contempt. Warwick's brief spell when he 'became a writer for bread, and depended entirely on the booksellers for support' enables Smith to present a satirical portrait of the workings of the book trade and the literary establishment in both Edinburgh and London (p. 97). The criticism of the forces which affected the writers of novels is a further reminder that to sell her own novels, Smith felt constrained to fulfil publishers' and readers' expectations of the genre, irrespective of whether these were in line with her own perceptions of their validity.

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*The Banished Man*, published in August 1794, is more clearly part of the continuum of Smith's political thought. Unlike *The Wanderings of Warwick*, it is set within a contemporary time-frame and reacts to the violence of the Reign of Terror, particularly the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793. This event dominates the early part of the novel, both emotionally and politically, together with the Revolutionary Wars in Europe, in which, from February 1793, England was also involved. The plight of French émigrés is also an important influence. Not only were these refugees unable to return to France, they were now subject in England to the Alien Act of 7 January 1793, which gave the government the power to arrest or deport any alien.<sup>231</sup>

In *The Banished Man*, Smith attempts to come to terms with the violent course

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<sup>231</sup> For accounts of the Alien Act and its effects, see: Toby Ruth Benis, "'A Likely Story': Charlotte Smith's Revolutionary Narratives", *European Romantic Review*, 14 (2003), 291-306 (pp. 292-3); Amy Garnai, 'The Alien Act and Negative Cosmopolitanism in *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), pp. 101-12 (pp. 102-3).

of a Revolution based on ideals which she had endorsed with enthusiasm. In the composition of this complex novel she is clearly questioning principles, modifying and developing her political ideas, responding to what Mark Philp describes as ‘events’, or ‘others’ responses to events’.<sup>232</sup> Smith poses and attempts to answer a major question which was also being addressed by contemporary polemical writers: whether the ideals which inspired the Revolution retained their validity despite their apparent failure in France. Taking her cue from the popular reporting and perception of Louis’ execution as a family tragedy, Smith makes the patriarchal family a major locus of her attempts to come to terms with the betrayal of the ideals of the Revolution in France. Accordingly, the accounts of the treatment of the French royal family and the general state of affairs in France are, in the early chapters, focalised through the emotive narrative of the Chevalier D’Alonville, a royalist émigré and his dying father, the Viscount De Fayolles.

That the execution of Louis should exert emotive power upon the work of Smith is not surprising. For some radicals, Louis’ execution was not an issue -- or at any rate not admitted to be one; for example, William Frend writes of ‘Louis Capet’ who was ‘accused of enormous crimes, confined as a state prisoner, tried by the national convention, found guilty and executed’ and asks, ‘What is there wonderful in all this?’<sup>233</sup> However, for many others, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams, Louis’ death exerted a powerful effect, despite their continued promotion of the ideals of the Revolution. In *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe* (1794) Wollstonecraft affirms her belief in the need for the replacement of despotic rules and gives a number of reasons for the

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<sup>232</sup> See above, Introduction, p. 5.

<sup>233</sup> William Frend, *Peace and Union Recommended to the Associated Bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans* (St Ives: P. C. Croft, 1793), repr. in *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. by Gregory Claeys, vol. 4, pp. 105-28 (p. 125).

difficulties into which the Revolution had run.<sup>234</sup>

However, when she comes to consider the actuality of Louis' trial and execution there is ambivalence or, at the very least, a sense of unease. She attempts to justify the king's death by describing his behaviour before his downfall in grotesque and disturbing terms. Steven Blakemore suggests that Wollstonecraft and others 'rewrite' the history of the Revolution, using a variety of paradigms to justify and obviate the 'guilt' of their original support and that Wollstonecraft's need to demonise the king leads her to give contradictory versions of his character.<sup>235</sup> For example, at one point Wollstonecraft describes the king as 'passive', without 'sufficient resolution' but with 'a considerable amount of common sense, and a desire to promote useful reformation, though always governed by those around him'.<sup>236</sup> At another she depicts his pleasure in seeing 'grimaces, made by tortured animals' and claims that the queen had to dissuade him from 'throwing a cat down the chimney, or shooting a harmless ass'; he also 'daily practised the despicable shifts of duplicity; though led by his indolence to take, rather than to give the tone to his domineering parasites'.<sup>237</sup> This second version, which contradicts the first, is, according to Blakemore, taken from revolutionary sources with a vested interest in justifying the king's execution.

Wollstonecraft's disquiet, together with an emotional undertow, reveals itself more clearly in a letter which she wrote to Joseph Johnson in December 1792, after she had seen Louis XVI being driven to his trial.<sup>238</sup> Janet Todd argues that in this letter Wollstonecraft shows that her sympathy for the king as an individual was outweighing

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<sup>234</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), ed. by Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 370-1.

<sup>235</sup> Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), p. 102.

<sup>236</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View*, pp. 302-3.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>238</sup> Letter of 26 December 1792 to Joseph Johnson, repr. in *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 216-7.

her 'abstract anti- monarchical principles'.<sup>239</sup> A number of other critics also cite this letter in which Wollstonecraft describes the unexpected dignity of the king and in which she asks Johnson to pity her, for, she says, in the hotel room at night she has 'seen eyes glare through a glass-door opposite my chair, and bloody hands shook at me'. When she finally retires to bed, she is so shaken by the experience that, she reports, 'for the first time in my life, I cannot put out the candle'.<sup>240</sup>

Like Wollstonecraft, Williams was surprised by the behaviour of the king in the face of his impending fate, although she did not see him on the way to his trial and according to Deborah Kennedy, did not witness his execution.<sup>241</sup> Relying on reported accounts, Williams describes the king receiving the news of his forthcoming execution 'without dismay'. He displayed 'more firmness upon the scaffold than he had done upon the throne, and atoned for the weakness and inconsistency of his conduct in life, by the calmness and fortitude of his behaviour in death'.<sup>242</sup> Like Wollstonecraft, Williams tries to justify his death, although the point is muted and faintly made. She does, however, describe with pathos the behaviour of the whole family on the night before the execution. 'It was enough to consider this unfortunate person as a man, a husband, a father!' she writes.<sup>243</sup> A particularly emotive detail is that of the request by the nine-year old Dauphin that he be allowed to go to all the districts of Paris, 'demander grace pour mon papa'.<sup>244</sup> The scene is curtailed, but although sympathy for the participants in the royal family romance is not allowed to alter Williams's

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<sup>239</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View*, p. xxv.

<sup>240</sup> See, for example, Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation*, p. 112; Tom Furniss, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's French Revolution', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 59-71 (pp. 64-5); Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, p. 131.

<sup>241</sup> Deborah Kennedy, 'Spectacle of the Guillotine: Helen Maria Williams and the Reign of Terror', *Philological Quarterly*, 73 (1994), pp. 95-113 (p. 104).

<sup>242</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *Letters From France: Containing a Great Variety of Interesting and Original Information Concerning the Most Important Events that Have Lately Occurred in that Country, and Particularly Respecting the Campaign of 1792* (London: G.G. & J. Robinson, 1793), vol. IV, Letter I, p. 28.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

overriding message of support for the ultimate value of the Revolution, the emotional impact of Louis' execution is evident.

Although the action of *The Banished Man* begins in October 1792, the writing of the work draws on the groundswell of public sympathy which followed the execution. Smith makes the king's death a major trope and the connection between it and the De Fayolles 'family romance' one of its central and defining features. As has been argued earlier, in *Celestina* Smith had employed the family romance as a way of promoting the principles of the French Revolution. However, by 1794 in England the usual employment of the trope was in politically anti-radical reports of Louis' execution. John Barrell argues that the execution was presented largely as a family tragedy, using the language of sentiment and concentrating particularly on details of the King's last meeting with his family.<sup>245</sup> This presentation was highly successful in encouraging sympathy for the French royal family and therefore suited those in the British government who wished to justify the war with France, continue the legal crackdown on radical writing, mobilise sympathy for George III and ensure that the British would not follow the French into the creation of a republic.

At the beginning of the novel, D'Alonville, a young Frenchman, and his father have been fighting with counter-Revolutionary troops alongside Austro-Hungarian forces, probably in the Rhineland.<sup>246</sup> They escape the advance of the French forces but De Fayolles is injured and father and son take refuge in the Castle of Rosenheim, where they are helped by Madame D'Alberg the daughter of the owner. Here the Viscount dies, blaming his other, older son (rather than his wounds) for his death. The reason for this blame is not revealed until later, when it is reported that this son had become a supporter of the Revolution against the wishes of his royalist father and that these

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<sup>245</sup> John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-96* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 49-86.

<sup>246</sup> For suggestions as to the probable locations of this section, see *The Banished Man*, ed. by Grenby, p. 486. For a detailed chronology, maps and an account of the major military actions during 1792, see Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The French Revolutionary Wars* (Oxford: Osprey, 2001), pp. 10-11, 6, 25-6.

political choices had caused his father death-inducing distress (p. 171). The reader's emotional engagement with D'Alonville and his father, and with the royalist cause they espouse, is strengthened by connecting the Viscount's plight, that of the French king and that of the country, to *King Lear*. The title of the novel is the phrase accorded to Lear in his distress by another betrayed father, Gloucester.<sup>247</sup> Links to *King Lear*, with its themes of family betrayal, the death of a king and the subsequent chaos of his kingdom are clear in details from the opening chapters, where, like Lear, the Viscount is described as wandering a desolate landscape in 'darkness and tempest' (p. 126).

Connections made between the loyalty which the Viscount thinks should be offered to a father and to a king appear early in the novel. The Viscount asks D'Alonville to 'take from my breast this mark of many years faithful service to my now undone country, that you may now deliver it to my sovereign' (p. 126). Shortly afterwards, on the point of death, he tells D'Alonville:

'I die in the consciousness of never having violated the allegiance I swore to my king.

Remember, that to whatever fate you are destined, your father's last hope is, That in you his name will not be disgraced'. (p. 131)

The pro-royalist thrust of the narrative continues when a little later D'Alonville returns, at considerable risk, to the now abandoned Castle of Rosenheim to collect deeds belonging to the owner of the castle, the Baron, thus symbolically saving the rights of property from the hands of revolutionaries. On his way he encounters hordes of émigrés in mental and physical distress, whose only crime had been 'adherence to the king whom they had sworn to defend' and for whom the previous government, 'however defective', was preferable to the 'tyrannical anarchy' which now prevailed (p. 170).

While at Rosenheim, D'Alonville draws together the metaphorical strands which have so far presented a powerfully anti- Revolutionary viewpoint:

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<sup>247</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R.A. Foakes (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1997), Act 3, Scene 4.

He hardly wished his father had lived to struggle with the bitterest evils of life, -- poverty and exile. To mourn over the dereliction of principle which had estranged him from his eldest son; the convulsions that had imprisoned the sovereign to whom he was attached, and the overthrow of the government he had sworn to support. 'The dead are happy,' cried he; 'in the grave they hear not the storms that shake to its centre the miserable kingdom of France'. (p. 168)

The theme of loyalty to father and monarch is forcefully revisited later, when D'Alonville, now in England, receives a lengthy letter from another émigré -- the Abbé de St Remi -- describing Louis XVI's imprisonment and trial. The king is, significantly, described with another quotation from *Lear* as 'A man more sinned against than sinning'.<sup>248</sup> After further comment on the 'softness' and 'mild indolence' of the monarch and his undeserved suffering, the letter continues immediately with the news that D'Alonville's brother 'who ought to bear the respectable name of De Fayolles' is now known as Du Bosse and is 'one of the most violent leaders of the faction who are deluging with blood our unhappy country' (pp. 238-9).

The choice of the brother's name is almost certainly significant. Chris Jones notes an error in the 'early part' of the first edition of the novel: a misspelling of 'Du Bosse' as 'Du Fosse'. As Jones rightly says, it 'would bring to many minds the story of the Du Fossé family'.<sup>249</sup> To be more accurate, it actually appears as 'Monsieur la Fosse' in the first edition, but it is an interesting slip nonetheless, particularly if it is an authorial rather than typesetter's mistake.<sup>250</sup> If it is the former, then there is a concrete indication that Smith had the Du Fossé story in mind as she framed this anti-Revolution family romance, a deliberate counter to its use in *Celestina*.<sup>251</sup> In any case, there is sufficient similarity between the two names to suggest that she is refuting the tale which claimed that the Revolution had brought an end to tyranny.

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<sup>248</sup> *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 2.

<sup>249</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 173.

<sup>250</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Banished Man. A Novel* (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1794), vol. III, Chapter III, p. 28.

<sup>251</sup> See Chapter 2, above, pp. 52-61.

The climax of the De Fayolles story is the rescue of D'Alonville from death by his brother. The two come face to face when D'Alonville is captured in Rennes and brought before the Revolutionary commissioners. Du Bosse's intervention ensures that his brother is moved to Paris, instead of being executed. A meeting between the brothers ensues, in which each presents arguments in favour of his political viewpoint, each claiming to have principles as the basis for his actions. The bias is clearly on the side of D'Alonville, however, whose sarcastic comment that Du Bosse has let the 'sacred love of immortal liberty' destroy 'the ties of blood' is followed by the authorial judgement that for Du Bosse, 'the charge which was, he knew, but too well founded, of having driven his father to die in despair, visibly shook him' (p. 356).

Du Bosse's apparent care for his brother is ultimately revealed as self-interest, despite Jones's claim that the episode 'invites a reading which is in conflict with D'Alonville's "impatient prejudices"' and that Du Bosse treats his brother with 'quite fraternal benevolence'.<sup>252</sup> This view does not take into account the fact that Du Bosse's motives are said by Smith to be 'completely explained' and that his behaviour is motivated by cunning self-preservation, although it is true that some pro-Revolutionary rhetoric is placed against D'Alonville's emotional royalism. Concerned that his own life is in danger from the rise of the Jacobins -- 'a party formed against the true interests of the country' -- Du Bosse intends to use his brother to take his 'portable effects' to England. This is a prelude to his own, ultimately unsuccessful attempt to escape from his enemies, which results in his execution (pp. 363, 367).

The emotive power of the D'Alonville narrative must account, at least in part, for popular contemporary perception of the novel as a recantation of Smith's radical views. For example, *The Critical Review* writes that one of Smith's motives for writing the novel is 'to reinstate herself in the opinions of those who have been offended by the

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<sup>252</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 173.



turn of her politics in a former publication, and to do away all suspicion of her having embraced the wrong side of the question'.<sup>253</sup> *The Analytical Review* remarks that in *Desmond*, Smith 'maintained the cause of the French Revolution', but that 'on account of various excesses and enormities, which have arisen in the course of this great effort for the recovery of freedom, the cause is to be abandoned'.<sup>254</sup>

In her Preface, however, Smith claims that her adherence to libertarian principles is unchanged and her quarrel is with those who have seized power in its name:

If I had been convinced I was in error in regard to what I formerly wrote on the politics of France, I should without hesitation avow it. I still think, however, that no native of England could help *then* rejoicing at the probability there was that the French nation would obtain, with very little bloodshed, that degree of freedom which we have been taught to value so highly. But I think also, that Englishmen must execrate the abuse of the name of Liberty which has followed; they must feel it to be injurious to the *real* existence of that first of blessings, and must contemplate with mingled horror and pity, a people driven by terror to commit enormities which, in the course of a few months, have been more destructive than the despotism of ages: a people who, in the place of a mild and well-meaning monarch, have given themselves up to the tyranny of monsters. (pp. 108-9)

Even in this extract, however, the emotional effect of Louis' execution overshadows the statement of belief in abstract political principle.<sup>255</sup> Similarly, the subsequent attempts in the narrative to present a reasoned challenge to D'Alonville's royalist views are hampered by the emotive power of the images of regicide. This is not to say, however, that Smith has recanted her political radicalism in favour of royalism, although she offers no simple answer as to whether the failure of the Revolution in France invalidates its principles or as to what should be the way ahead for those who oppose despotic and

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<sup>253</sup> *The Critical Review*, 13 (March 1795), p. 275.

<sup>254</sup> *The Analytical Review*, 20 (November 1794), p. 254.

<sup>255</sup> For a similar distinction between principles and their grotesque misapplication, together with the presentation of the king as a victim, see Smith, *The Emigrants*, in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 14, p. 138.

hierarchical systems. Several modern critics have tried, mistakenly, to show that Smith promotes a particular viewpoint; significantly, they disagree as to what that viewpoint is. For example, Fletcher refers to 'the conservative stance of *The Banished Man*'.<sup>256</sup>

For Angela Keane, the novel provides a critique of 'the tyranny of the new regime in France' and is 'a continuing argument for the republican cause elsewhere in Europe'.<sup>257</sup>

Katharine Astbury agrees with and quotes Fry's opinion that 'the tone of the work favours the liberal'.<sup>258</sup> Jones argues, on the contrary, that the novel could be read as more radical than *The Old Manor House* in that it 'uses the contemporary French situation to reflect criticism of British conditions'.<sup>259</sup>

The difficulty with identifying an over-riding political viewpoint is that Smith presents several mutually exclusive answers, plausibly voiced by characters with whom D'Alonville interacts during a complicated narrative of his wanderings across Europe. These wanderings are, for much of the novel, motivated by his need to find a way of continuing his support for the counter-Revolutionary cause, although this is difficult in a Europe where 'a thousand vague reports, mistrusts, and misconceptions, were continually baffling or distracting the best imagined schemes' and where betrayal by spies was rife (p. 183). In Vienna, he meets the Marquis de Touranges, an aristocratic royalist acquaintance, and the Abbé de St. Remi, Touranges' friend and former tutor, and travels with them to Prague, then Dresden. On the journey they encounter Ellesmere, an English nobleman of liberal sympathies, who joins the travelling group. Continuing towards Berlin, they meet Carlowitz, a Polish radical and his daughter Alexina, with whom Ellesmere falls in love. D'Alonville is persuaded by Ellesmere to

<sup>256</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography*, p.168.

<sup>257</sup> Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, p. 91.

<sup>258</sup> Katherine Astbury, 'Charlotte Smith's *The Banished Man* in French Translation; or, The Politics of Novel-Writing during the French Revolution', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe, pp. 129-33 (p. 129).

<sup>259</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 171. For further critical assessment of Smith's political stance in this novel see, for example, Katherine Rogers, 'Romantic Aspirations, Restricted Possibilities: the Novels of Charlotte Smith', in *Revisioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. by Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1994), pp. 72-88 (p. 80); Toby Ruth Benis, 'A Likely Story', pp. 291, 305.

go to England with him; he goes first to London and then to the Ellesmere estate, where he meets Mrs Denzil and her family, who live in the vicinity, and falls in love with Angelina, Mrs Denzil's daughter. He also finds the missing family of De Touranges, who have been helped by the Denzils. On D'Alonville's return to France to help the royalist cause, he is captured in Brittany, where he is brought before the magistrate, his brother, Du Bosse. The latter makes it possible for D'Alonville to escape and return to England, where he marries Angelina and lives for a time in Wales. D'Alonville's wanderings are ended in Verona, where he sets up home with Angelina, her mother and some of the other protagonists.

Smith uses De Touranges, Ellesmere and Carlowitz to present and represent political sympathies against which the hitherto emotionally persuasive royalism of D'Alonville can be tested and evaluated. The views range from the fervent but often ill-judged royalist views of De Touranges, through the liberal views of Ellesmere, to the revolutionary zeal of Carlowitz. However, although there are several informal political debates between these characters and the sense of comparing and weighing opinions, there is no resolution of the political questions raised. Rather, there is ambivalence and a sense of political stasis and irresolution.

Smith's political ambivalence is apparent in her presentation of the Marquis de Touranges. Although he is a royalist, like D'Alonville, his characterisation invites contempt as well as pity. He is a military man, whose wife and child have vanished, together with his mother, the latter having already survived the September Massacres. Despite an early intellectual dalliance with radicalism he now 'vehemently cursed the very name of Liberty, which had been used only as a pretext to effectuate the change he execrated' (p. 184). While his situation is pitied by other characters, and the suffering of his family worthy of compassion, he also seems to reinforce the politically radical stereotyping of the volatility and temperamental uselessness of the proud French

aristocrat. Variouslly described as 'turbulent and irritated', in 'paroxysms of rage' or of 'fear' and 'now on the verge of frenzy and now of suicide', De Touranges is unable to cope with the rigours and hardships of life after the downfall of the *ancien régime* (pp.184-5, 187). In the public sphere he is enthusiastic but of little use, rushing with futile haste into royalist military endeavours. The last mention of him is in connection with another unwise decision, this time to depart for Flanders, against all advice, to a gathering of royalist forces (p. 476). Domestically, he is similarly inadequate and relies largely on the support of other characters to survive at all and bring even the basic necessities of life to his family when they are found in England. His arrival there does alleviate their immediate emotional distress but, according to Mrs Denzil, soon his presence actually rendered their situation more distressing. Mrs Denzil, a Charlotte Smith *alter ego*, also enduring a kind of banishment from her rightful place in society and suffering privation, believes that the Marquis had been 'accustomed to every luxury and indulgence that illustrious birth and high affluence gave him a right to enjoy' and that he 'had not learned, nor seemed ever likely to learn, the hard lesson of subduing his spirit to his fortune' (p. 403).

Such characteristics are in line with those cited by radicals as both a cause of and a justification for the Revolution. Wollstonecraft, for example, has much to say about the French national character, claiming that it determined the nature of the French court, the type of aristocrat who formed it and the inability of the revolutionaries to put the principles of the Revolution into practice. She criticises the volatile, superficial character of the French as a nation, whose 'enthusiasm' usually 'hurries them from one extreme to another'.<sup>260</sup> According to Wollstonecraft, 'their sensations are ever lively and transitory: exhaled by every passing beam and dissipated by the slightest storm'.<sup>261</sup>

D'Alonville both criticises and justifies the behaviour of De Touranges. For

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<sup>260</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View*, p. 300.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

example, he defends him by citing the loss of his family: 'If you knew what he suffers as an individual [...] the want of fortitude, which you justly remark, would appear more excusable'. The defence is immediately undermined, however: 'perhaps the Marquis De Touranges has more than his share of pride. Allied to the first houses in France, and boasting of blood, second only to that of royalty, it is more difficult for him than for most others' (p. 207). In other words, the higher the rank, the less one is able to exhibit basic human compassion and the more protected and isolated one is from life's hardships. At this moment, the primary apologist for royalism, D'Alonville, both explains and criticises the behaviour of another of its representatives so that by this point in the narrative Smith has presented a strong case for both the retention of and the abolition of the *ancien régime* and its aristocratic power base.

The same political ambivalence is evident in the depiction of Carlowitz, whose radicalism offers an alternative to both royalism and French-style revolution. He is a revolutionary from Poland, where a liberal constitution had been introduced in 1791, then overthrown by the invasion of Catherine the Great's forces in 1792. Under threat of imprisonment, Carlowitz has been forced to leave and is now being nursed by his daughter through a fever. He is, however, intent on soon being able to give his support to the Polish struggle to reinstate lost freedoms and is devoted to the cause, speaking for it with 'vehement enthusiasm' (p. 214). Toby Ruth Benis suggests, convincingly, that Smith models this character on that of the Polish reformer Kościuszko, who led an uprising against the Russians in March 1794.<sup>262</sup>

However, when holding forth about these deeply-felt beliefs to D'Alonville, Carlowitz stops, recollecting that different listeners might have different principles, or because he was 'perhaps reading in the countenance of D'Alonville some dissent from

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<sup>262</sup> Benis, 'A Likely Story', p. 293. For an account of the history of Poland during this period and the part played by Kościuszko, see Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 124-34.

his opinion'. D'Alonville points out that they have exile in common and that they are both affected in their political opinions by their circumstances. D'Alonville's opinion is that had he been Polish he 'might have thought and acted' as Carlowitz had done and, conversely, Carlowitz would have viewed matters differently if he were in D'Alonville's position. This 'candid discussion' soon had the effect of setting 'the new friends mutually at ease with one another' (p. 214). In this spirit of relativism, the discussion of principles becomes part of a male-bonding activity, opposed viewpoints co-existing, and authorial decision as to their individual validity again not clearly manifested.

Further authorial ambivalence characterises Smith's presentation of Ellesmere. The story of Ellesmere's relationship with his own father, Sir Maynard, can be read as a counterbalance to the support for patriarchy which the D'Alonville narrative has promoted. Although the Ellesmere family romance is not overtly linked to the Louis XVI story, there is a deliberate parallel between the families of Ellesmere and D'Alonville, with filial loyalty the common theme. Unlike De Fayolles, Ellesmere's father, Sir Maynard is far from deserving of the kind of loyalty he is accorded and the story of his dealings with his family is a cautionary tale, warning of the dangers of patriarchal authority and primogeniture. It is not until his oldest son and grandson die that Sir Maynard has any interest in his second son and feels some guilt because of 'the little affection he had formerly shown him' (p. 394). Ellesmere knows that he will never agree to his marriage to Alexina, but 'loved and respected him too much, to think of marrying contrary to his wishes' (p. 385). Later, however, Ellesmere's 'resolution to unite his fate with Alexina, acquired strength every day' (p. 404). Were he to carry this through, there would be a symbolic distancing from D'Alonville's patriarchal viewpoint, but Smith avoids this, by conveniently killing off Sir Maynard and leaving Ellesmere able to fulfil what D'Alonville describes as 'the filial duty Ellesmere had paid

to a father, who had no other claim to it than that he *was* his father'. The ambivalence is reinforced by the author's assurance that this was 'now consoling' to him and also to D'Alonville, who, 'when he recollected how religiously he had fulfilled, as far as was in his power, the duties *he* owed, felt also that satisfaction which only the discharge of duties can bestow' (pp. 442-3).

In several respects, Ellesmere's political views are similar to those claimed by Smith in the Preface to be her own. For example, he thinks that 'whatever had been his original sentiments', he was 'disgusted by the folly, the wickedness, and unmanly cruelty of the persons into whose hands the government of that country had fallen' (p. 341). Also, he expresses concern for the French royal family and anger that it is not possible to rescue 'from the unworthy insults of the most unfeeling wretches that ever disgraced humanity, the widow, the sister, and the children of the murdered monarch' (p. 341). He shares Smith's compassion for the plight of the émigrés, describing them as 'seeking in some other country, an asylum against the tyranny and injustice that is executing in their own' but is not influenced enough by D'Alonville's arguments 'to alter his original opinions as to the errors of the former government of their country' (pp. 202, 207-8).

However, although Smith seems sometimes to use Ellesmere to represent her stated political standpoint, the way in which Ellesmere functions in the novel does not promote this role very strongly, particularly as a counterbalance to the D'Alonville narrative strand. His views are often described by the author, rather than expressed directly, which means that they lack the emotive power of D'Alonville's first person narrative and, as Jones argues, Ellesmere 'is not allowed to dominate or conclude a debate'.<sup>263</sup> As far as any privileging of the Ellesmere viewpoint is concerned, there is often an authorial sidestepping of the political issues, for Smith allows D'Alonville,

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<sup>263</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p. 170.

Ellesmere and Carlowitz to beg to differ, as if all viewpoints can be given credence and co-exist happily, with Ellesmere 'admirably fitted for an umpire in their friendly political disputes' (p. 387).

Through this narrative of multi-national, dispossessed wanderers, Smith shows that France cannot be the model of social justice and there is obviously no prospect of this in war-torn Europe. England also gives little hope, despite its promotion in the writings of some contemporaries as a refuge from French atheism and anarchy and the true home of liberty and justice. As Craciun has argued, influential anti-radical writers such as Hannah More and Frances Burney, as well as other authors of plays, books and children's literature used the figure of the émigré to idealise Britain in this way.<sup>264</sup> However, the treatment generally meted out to them belied this idealisation. Amy Garnai argues that the response to émigrés was mainly xenophobic and although there was 'sympathy' for the refugees from 'Revolutionary violence', 'it was countered by traditional anti-French and anti-Catholic biases'.<sup>265</sup> The treatment of D'Alonville in the world of post-Alien Act England, which is little different from the suspicion and hatred which he encounters elsewhere in Europe, shows that Smith sees England in this latter way. When he is in London, he notes that the English rescue 'with one hand' the dispossessed émigrés and with the other want to 'draw the sword against a whole people'. The common people hear of the atrocities in France and attribute this to everyone French, 'adding to their long rooted national hatred, the detestation raised by these horrors' (p. 227).

The impression that England will not provide the soil in which freedom and justice will flourish is reinforced by Mrs Denzil. Like Smith herself, she is a mother, forced to endure poverty and dispossession and has first-hand experience of legal corruption and social injustice. Her situation is linked directly to that of the émigrés

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<sup>264</sup> Craciun, *British Women Writers*, pp.141-9.

<sup>265</sup> Garnai, 'The Alien Act', p. 103.



when in a conversation with D'Alonville she comments that she and her children 'have also been wanderers and exiles' and the 'victims of injustice, oppression and fraud' (p. 268). Mrs Denzil's further accounts of her experiences with the entrenched corruption and injustices of England's legal and social systems belie further any hope for England as the upholder of liberty and future locus of reform.

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In its commentary on *The Wanderings of Warwick*, this chapter has presented the argument that Smith increasingly draws attention to the artificiality of the courtship novel form and the mismatch between the fictional and the real. In *The Banished Man*, the ironic distancing of Smith the author from the demands of the genre is even more apparent, the form of the novel even more innovative.

Smith indicates clearly her attitude to the genre and its conventions when she unexpectedly inserts into the so far emotionally intense and absorbing narrative, a section entitled 'AVIS AU LECTEUR' by way of an informal preface to volume II (pp. 193-6). It opens with a quotation from Sterne, a hint that what is to follow is innovative and iconoclastic: "“There was, an please your Honor”, said Corporal Trim; “there was a certain king of Bohemia, who had seven castles”” (p. 193). Smith directly addresses the reader and comments upon this quotation, which is quickly followed by a passage of dialogue between the 'Author' and a 'Friend'. This is framed as a script, which removes it still further from the novel genre although it is physically part of the text. With jesting and ironic awareness of her own novelistic creations, Smith satirises the conventions of popular novels and the expectations of readers. Sterne's reference to 'seven castles' leads her to a comical consideration of the importance of castles in popular novels:

But my ingenious contemporaries have so fully possessed themselves of every bastion and

buttress [...] that I had some doubts whether, to avoid the charge of plagiarism, it would not have been better to have *earthed* my hero. (p. 193)

The importance of including a courtship plot is discussed by the Author and the Friend, with the former suggesting that despite the expectations of her readers, she might avoid using one altogether:

As I thought, in the present instance, the situation of my hero was of itself interesting enough to enable me to carry him on for sometime, without making him violently in love, I was determined to try the experiment. (p. 195)

Jokingly the Author remarks at the end of her dismissal of both 'castles' and 'love':

I think I have taken my leave for ever of that species of writing [...] in this, as in every other species of composition, there is a sort of fashion of the day. *Le vrai*, which you so properly recommend, or even *la vrai semblance*, seems to be not the present fashion. (pp. 195-6)

In the 'AVIS', Smith is drawing attention to the process which is already evident in her earlier novels -- a rejection of the conventions of courtship novels -- because she believes that the social and political values which they endorse are false. *The Banished Man* moves further than any of her previous novels down this route. Its trajectory and resolution bear little relation to those novels in which a noble landed property falls to the lot of a young hero and heroine of suitable virtue, if not rank, whose inheritance and marriage represents the status quo of traditional society and the continuity of the British constitution.

Although Smith does, in spite of her protestations, include in the narrative two castles, Rosenheim and Vaudrecour, which function as symbols of the old order, neither functions as landed property in the manner of Mowbray Castle or Rayland Hall as a reward for the virtuous protagonists. She also includes two courtship plots, but does not use either to resolve the novel. The courtship plots are obviously paralleled, multi-national, multi-religious love stories which end in marriages in the fourth volume of the novel. One is that of D'Alonville with Angelina, an event which is a fictional counterpart to the union, in August 1793, of Smith's daughter Augusta to an aristocratic

émigré, Alexandre Marc-Constant De Foville. The other, even more briefly sketched love story is that of Ellesmere and Alexina. Both courtships and marriages are subsidiary to the stories of physical endangerment and to political ruminations and take place well before the final resolution of the novel.

In this, some of the protagonists retreat to the mountains of Italy near Verona, giving a sense of withdrawal and refuge from the insoluble problems of political belief and action which the narrative has dramatised. In Grenby's opinion, Smith 'manages to engineer a happy ending' by sending the protagonists to 'an almost pantisocratic community far removed from both French excess and the quieter vices of the British'. He also suggests that the ending 'echoes *Desmond*' because both novels conclude with Anglo-French communities set apart from society (p. xix). However, while the resolution of *Desmond* returns the protagonists to the conventional securities of landed estate and patriarchal family in England, it is an important distinction that the resolution of the later novel is in Italy, as if a reformed England is no longer a possibility. Indeed, some critics have argued that Smith was now looking outside both France and England as a way forward from the disappointed hopes for radical change, and that this is part of a 'Citizen of the World' ideal to which she increasingly turns. For example, Craciun claims that Smith's increasing pessimism about the Revolution means that 'she looks across national boundaries for alternative, imagined communities'. With each successive novel of the Revolutionary era, Smith would widen this 'circle of friends', developing it into 'her cosmopolitan ideal'.<sup>266</sup> Anne Mellor has also written of Smith's commitment to a 'multi-lingual, united Europe' which is 'free from national and religious conflict' and argues that in the resolution of *The Banished Man* the European cosmopolitan community is situated 'outside the national boundaries of every one of her

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<sup>266</sup> Craciun, *British Women Writers*, pp.153-5.

major characters'.<sup>267</sup>

Not all critics have seen the Italian idyll as a complete resolution. Keane draws attention to the context of war which 'precludes a more Utopian project', and Garnai to the feelings of 'longing and unease that temper the complacency of the exilic group'.<sup>268</sup> However, unlike these critics, I would argue that the resolution is itself inflected by the tentative searching for certainty and security which has characterised the entire narrative. The Italian idyll is one of several possibilities for the future, with the choices, both personal and political of the protagonists still not in accord. Just as in the 'debates' of the main narrative, there is accord at a personal level, but no agreement on political principle.

The sense of a hoped-for but not necessarily inevitable future characterises the resolution in several ways. Not only is the group incomplete, but its permanency is dubious and the war and political affiliations continue to influence the behaviour of the protagonists. D'Alonville lives in domestic bliss with Angelina and her mother, who describes their home as an 'elevated little mansion' which is 'not half way up the stupendous mountain to which it clings' (p. 478). The Abbé de St Remi lives in a convent nearby and is able to be the confessor to the Catholics in the group. In the area also live the family from Rosenheim, including Madame D'Alberg, who had given shelter to D'Alonville and his father (p. 476). However, they are in a 'temporary residence', with D'Alonville expressing his 'hopes' that the families will 'live much' together when winter forces him to leave his mountain idyll (p. 476). Ellesmere and Alexina are still in England, and D'Alonville looks again to the future rather than the present as he writes to Ellesmere of his 'hope that you will remain firm in your purpose of joining us here' (p. 479).

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<sup>267</sup> Anne Mellor, 'Embodied Cosmopolitanism and the British Romantic Writer', *European Romantic Review*, 17 (2006), 290-300 (pp. 293, 297).

<sup>268</sup> Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, p. 96; Garnai, 'The Alien Act', p. 110.

Unmodified political ideals, coupled with a concern for national rather than multi-national interests, mean that De Touranges has gone to rejoin the royalist army in Flanders, so his family already living with the group are 'unhappy' and this 'detracts from the pleasure' of the 'little society' (p. 476). Similarly motivated by political belief and concern for his country, Carlowitz is in London, trying to rally support for the radical cause in Poland and although Grenby claims that he 'never suggests' that he will return to Poland (p. xxii), it is certainly implied that he has the wish to do so on two occasions. He is said to be intending to return should he receive any encouragement from Polish patriots and, according to D'Alonville seems 'impatient to return to Poland' (pp. 387, 407). Even D'Alonville himself is urged by Ellesmere, Angelina and her mother not to succumb to the temptation to return prematurely to France but to resist 'the frequent impulses' which he feels 'to return to the emigrant army' (p. 473).

A reminder of the political differences which thus undermine the resolution, despite the attempt at cosmopolitan unity, is found in the final chapter, when, in a letter to D'Alonville, Ellesmere refers to the Revolution and their differences of opinion. He writes:

*You think, that even in its first germinations it threatened to become the monster we see now. I still think, that originating from the acknowledged faults of your former government, the first design, aiming only at the correction of those faults, at a limited monarchy and a mixed government, was the most sublime and most worthy of a great people that was ever recorded in the annals of mankind. (pp. 473-4)*

The resolution reflects Smith's doubts about the ultimate outcome of radical hopes for the future of both France and England and whether the ideals upon which these hopes were based retained their validity. The novel is an unresolved search for certainty, in which Smith exploits its poly-vocal form to accommodate political ambivalence. The work is less a statement than an exploration of political belief, with the emotional and the empathetic jostling with the rational and the philosophical.

Moreover, the use of an *émigré* narrative enables a complex interaction between the wandering and searching for physical security of some of the protagonists and at a deeper level the search for security of belief which is ultimately the quest of the author. The philosophical perturbation of the novel, literalised in a narrative of wandering, is not fully quieted in an imagined cosmopolitan utopia.

## Chapter Six

### A Radical Critique of Marriage: *Montalbert* (1795)

Unlike *The Banished Man*, *Montalbert*, published in June 1795, remains silent on events set in train by the French Revolution and on questions concerning principles of government and constitution, matters of obviously national import.<sup>269</sup> Instead it offers a critique of marriage, through the emotional, sexual and marital histories of a mother and daughter.

It is possible that Smith made this decision because of the ever-increasing restrictions imposed by the Pitt administration on the expression of anti-establishment views. During the period of the novel's composition, there was a further government clampdown on freedom of expression in both speaking and writing, manifested in the so-called 'Treason Trials' of 1794, in which important radical leaders, including Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, Thomas Holcroft, Thomas Spence and John Thelwall, were arrested and tried. After their arrests, *Habeas Corpus* had even been suspended to allow the government to hold the prisoners, without charge if necessary, until February 1795. Smith, perhaps for reasons of self-protection, therefore avoids what Carrol Fry argues is 'overtly political content', a category in which he includes such ingredients as 'references to reform of parliament', 'anti-war sentiments' and 'specific criticism of British law'.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Montalbert* (1795), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 8, ed. by Stuart Curran and Adriana Craciun. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>270</sup> Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 124.

Several critics have suggested that Smith's difficult personal circumstances help account for her choice of material for this novel, and that she chose to withdraw from the lists of potentially damaging political battle as a way of preserving herself physically and emotionally from the difficult reality of her life during the novel's composition. Having claimed that the novel marks Smith's 'retreat from political themes to the safety of sentimental romance', Judith Stanton notes that in 1795 she was deeply affected by the death of her daughter, which 'dominated the year'.<sup>271</sup> Smith's pregnant daughter had become ill, and later gave birth to a son who died at a few days old in Smith's arms in July 1794; his mother never recovered and died in April 1795.<sup>272</sup> Judith Davis Miller makes a more direct connection between Smith's private life and her writing, arguing that, 'Tired from the fray, and overwhelmed with the critical illness of Anna Augusta, Smith turned to writing a novel that escaped entirely from direct comment on the contemporary political scene and returned to her earlier style'.<sup>273</sup>

However, terms such as 'retreat', 'escape' and 'safety' can be used of *Montalbert* only in the sense that Smith refrains from commenting on events in France and from making explicit criticism of the British government and constitution. This particular 'sentimental romance' is a place of 'safety' only in the sense that it would not attract a prosecution for sedition or treason and be rejected by publishers on these grounds. It is a mistake however, to think of this novel as apolitical or as a withdrawal from matters of political debate or to see it as a backward step into sentimental conservatism. On the contrary, the novel continues Smith's attack on the status quo by undermining the conventional novelistic portrayals of patriarchal family, inherited landed property and marriage, a method of attack which has characterised her previous novels. In *Montalbert*, Smith moves to an even more radically political rejection of

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<sup>271</sup> Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 183.

<sup>272</sup> See letter of 27 July 1794 to James Upton Tripp, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, footnote, pp. 194-5.

<sup>273</sup> Miller, 'The Politics of Truth and Deception', in *Rebellious Hearts*, ed. by Craciun and Lokke, p. 351.



traditional assumptions about marriage and female behaviour than in her previous work, engaging with contemporary discourse on marriage, in which polemical comment made by Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin was particularly important. In this novel, her critique of marriage reaches its zenith and pushes against the boundaries of the conventions of the courtship novel in innovative and iconoclastic ways.

It should be stressed that matters of marriage and female behaviour were political issues. This point was notably articulated by Burke, for whom they were of central importance to the state, ensuring the safe transmission of property and the power associated with it, down the generations of the patriarchal family. Burke articulates his concern about women's role within the patriarchal family in his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791):

When [...] your families are no longer protected by decent pride, and salutary domestic prejudice, there is but one step to a frightful corruption. The rulers in the National Assembly are in good hopes that the females of the first families in France may become an easy prey to dancing-masters, fiddlers, pattern-drawers, friseurs and valets de chambre, and other active citizens of that description, who having the entry into your houses, and being half domesticated by their situation, may be blended with you by regular and irregular relations. By a law, they have made these people your equals. By adopting the sentiments of Rousseau, they have made them your rivals. In this manner, these great legislators complete their plan of levelling, and establish their rights of men on a sure foundation. [...]

The great object of your tyrants, is to destroy the gentlemen of France; and for that purpose they destroy, to the best of their power, all the effect of those relations which may render considerable men powerful or even safe.<sup>274</sup>

The breakdown in deference to rank, patriarchal authority in the home and the principles of female behaviour which form the basis of traditional society results in the destruction of the blood-line of legal inheritance by 'irregular' sexual relationships.

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<sup>274</sup> Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, pp. 274-5.

Moreover, the father of the family is unable to trust his servants and thereby loses the sanctuary of his house. Images of a family in which the unfettered licence of its female members destroys its integrity are, by analogy, linked to the breakdown of civilised society and the integrity of the state.

Standing in opposition to Burke's defence of traditional marriage and its role in the preservation of existing socio-political systems are the critiques of marriage made by Wollstonecraft in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and by Godwin in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). These major polemical texts both address a topic which had, according to Gary Handwerk and A.A. Markley, 'considerable resonance in Jacobin literary circles'.<sup>275</sup> Because Wollstonecraft and Godwin present the issues overtly and argue from a politically radical standpoint, both texts are useful touchstones for an examination of Smith's critique of marriage in *Montalbert* and provide a measure of her radicalism.

That said, the contexts of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's critiques of marriage are rather different. Godwin's comments are part of a far-reaching exploration of the possibilities of a future utopian society; Wollstonecraft's are an integral part of a text devoted specifically to countering the injustice meted out to women by contemporary society. Godwin's comments in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* are brief -- a few paragraphs in the section entitled 'Of Property'.<sup>276</sup> Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, sustains and develops the topic at more length and with more complexity.

*Montalbert* can be read within this polemical context, as a critique of marriage, particularly as it pertained to women. Originally entitled *Rosalie*, after its identically named mother and daughter protagonists, *Montalbert* foregrounds the 'marriages' of the

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<sup>275</sup> William Godwin, *Fleetwood or The New Man of Feeling* (1805), ed. by Gary Handwerk and A.A. Markley (Broadview: Peterborough, Ontario, 2001), p. 28.

<sup>276</sup> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (London: G.G. & J. Robinson, 1793), pp. 848-50. This is the first edition of the text, which was not revised and re-published until the second edition of 1796, after the writing of *Montalbert*. References in this chapter are to the first edition unless otherwise stated.

two Rosalies, which comprise one love affair resulting in the birth of an illegitimate child, one unhappy forced marriage, and one marriage which is not legally valid.<sup>277</sup> The younger Rosalie is ostensibly the youngest daughter of the Lessington family but spends much time at the home of Mrs Vyvian, the friend of her 'mother'. Eventually it is revealed that Mrs Vyvian is actually her biological mother, née Rosalie Montalbert, who had a short love affair with a distant Irish relative, Ormsby. The older Rosalie's father, a repressive patriarch, discovered that the two young people were meeting and engineered Ormsby's removal by having him arrested for debt. Rosalie was forced to marry Mr Vyvian as a precondition of Ormsby's release. The latter went to India, not to return until late in the narrative, after her death. Unbeknown to Old Montalbert, Rosalie regarded herself as Ormsby's wife 'in the sight of Heaven' and was pregnant by the time of his banishment (p. 104). Old Montalbert became ill, which facilitated the secrecy necessary to conceal the birth of the child, a daughter, who was also called Rosalie. The younger Rosalie was passed off as the twin infant daughter of Mrs Lessington, whose own daughter then conveniently died. The older Rosalie then married Mr Vyvian. This 'detested marriage' brought unhappiness which embittered the rest of her life (p. 130).

This story of the older Rosalie, mainly related by herself to her daughter, is set into and is a counterpoint to the main narrative of the younger Rosalie's marriage and consequent suffering. The younger Rosalie, in a Catholic ceremony, which does not have legal status in England, secretly 'marries' her cousin, Harry Montalbert, the nephew of Mrs Vyvian. Later, Rosalie is left with her new-born son in Sicily while Montalbert goes to Italy to visit his autocratic Anglophobic mother, whom he has not told about his marriage. Rosalie is separated from him during the 1782 Sicilian

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<sup>277</sup> For information concerning the original title see Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 93.

earthquake and in desperation sends to her mother-in-law for help, which is not given. Instead, the latter organises Rosalie's imprisonment in the wilds of Calabria.

The two Rosalies are thematically closely interconnected in the narrative: both embark on a forbidden but sexually consummated relationship; both become mothers; both are parted from their child; both suffer physical and emotional suffering at the hands of autocratic Montalbert men; and both, by their entrapment within the closely guarded confines of marriage, can be seen as representative female victims of patriarchal society. In fact they are closely identified so successfully as to lead to some confusion even among commentators on the novel. Thus Smith's biographer, Loraine Fletcher, describes Ormsby as the older Rosalie's cousin, whereas he is actually a distant relative of her father (p. 99).<sup>278</sup> Similarly, Adriana Craciun, joint editor of the most recent edition of the novel, describes Harry Montalbert as 'again a distant relation', whereas he is actually her first cousin, the son of her mother's brother (pp. 20, 98).<sup>279</sup> Such confusion is perhaps understandable, and indicative that it is not the details of individual personality which dominate the narrative. The two Rosalies are part of a pattern, which is not altered by the passing of the generations and the particularities of circumstance.

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As Mark Philp argues, 'Godwin's criticisms of marriage are derived from his principles of justice -- particularly the individual's right *and duty* of private judgement: we cannot justly bind ourselves to another since we have a duty to preserve and act upon our independent private judgement'.<sup>280</sup> Godwin's objection to marriage is part of a wider

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<sup>278</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 243.

<sup>279</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, ed. by Curran and Craciun, p. ix.

<sup>280</sup> Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 181.

criticism of 'cohabitation' which maintains that the principle of life-long and legally enforced attachment to one person is contrary to human nature:

All attachments to individuals, except in proportion to their merits, are plainly unjust. It is therefore desirable, that we should be the friends of man rather than particular men, and that we should pursue the chain of our own reflexions, with no other interruption than information or philanthropy requires.

This subject of cohabitation is particularly interesting, as it includes in it the subject of marriage. It will therefore be proper to extend our enquiries somewhat further upon this head. Cohabitation is not only an evil as it checks the independent progress of mind; it is also inconsistent with the imperfections and propensities of man. It is absurd to expect that the inclinations and wishes of two human beings should coincide through any long period of time. To oblige them to act and live together, is to subject them to some inevitable portion of thwarting, bickering and unhappiness. This cannot be otherwise, so long as man has failed to reach the standard of absolute perfection.<sup>281</sup>

Smith does not critique marriage on these Godwinian grounds in *Montalbert* or indeed elsewhere. However, there is a similarity between the fictional marriages she depicts and the continuation of Godwin's critique in which he explores some of the features of modern marriage, employing what might almost be skeleton plots for a novel to illustrate his argument. Godwin uses one of these 'plots' to demonstrate that one of the primary problems of marriage is that it is encouraged by the often artificial circumstances of courtship so that the participants are blinded by considerations external, temporal and therefore misleading, at the expense of the truthful and permanent:

The habit is, for a thoughtless and romantic youth of each sex to come together, to see each other for a few times and under circumstances full of delusion, and then vow to each other eternal attachment. What is the consequence of this? In almost every instance they find themselves deceived. They are reduced to make the best of an irretrievable mistake. They are presented with the strongest imaginable temptation to become the dupes of falsehood. They are

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<sup>281</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice* (1793), pp. 848-9.

led to conceive it their wisest policy to shut their eyes upon realities, happy if by any perversion of intellect they can persuade themselves that they were right in their first crude opinion of their companion.<sup>282</sup>

The tale of the younger Rosalie and Montalbert, who quickly form a strong romantic attachment to one another, bears out Godwin's critique of the false expectations of marriage which society encourages. Rosalie and Montalbert begin to meet secretly after a very brief initial acquaintanceship and then conduct a romance by correspondence when the latter goes to Italy to see his mother. Rosalie's attraction to him on the basis of his external attractiveness and conduct is powerfully enhanced by the lure of forbidden attraction and secrecy. When Montalbert returns from Italy, Rosalie is staying with her now widowed 'mother' in Hampstead. Mrs Lessington spends most of her time socialising with card-playing acquaintances, leaving Rosalie alone. The lovers are now able to meet more easily and Smith sets up the conditions which inevitably result in the unsuitable marriage. Rosalie is only nineteen years old and is pressurised by Montalbert's pleas for her to marry him:

To be continually in presence [*sic*] of a beloved object, to see or suppose that his attachment every moment becomes stronger, to listen to arguments to which the heart yields but too ready an assent, was a situation of all others the most dangerous for a young woman who had not seen her nineteenth year. Montalbert, besides the advantages of a very handsome person, had the most insinuating manners and the most interesting address; he was naturally eloquent -- love rendered his eloquence doubly formidable; and Rosalie had nothing to oppose his earnest entreaties for a secret marriage, but the arms with which he had himself furnished her -- the fear of a discovery on the part of his mother, which he owned would injure, in deed ruin, his future prospects in life. (p. 60)

It is thus not difficult for Montalbert to persuade Rosalie into a secret, Catholic marriage, despite her 'vague' but accurate suspicion that such a marriage was not legal in England. He argues that the marriage would be binding to him as a Catholic and

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p. 849.

easily shakes Rosalie's 'wavering resolution'. Smith is careful to remind the reader of the illegality of this marriage in English law by including a lengthy paragraph describing the way in which Montalbert persuades Rosalie to put aside her doubts about it (p. 61). Shadowing the fictional story is the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753, which, among other requirements, insisted that marriages be solemnised in Anglican churches after the reading of banns or by official licence.<sup>283</sup> According to Rebecca Probert, from this time, the expectation for Catholics was that they 'continued to marry according to their own rites, but supplemented these with an Anglican marriage ceremony to ensure the validity of their union'.<sup>284</sup> The complications of a marriage in England between a Catholic and a Protestant were well known to Smith, who had arranged the marriage of her daughter Augusta to the French Catholic De Foville, the couple going through a Protestant as well as a Catholic ceremony.<sup>285</sup> Although this real marriage, which involved the marriage of a French subject, was obviously more problematical from a legal point of view than the fictional one, it is nevertheless clear that Smith is writing from an informed position when she implies that Montalbert persuades Rosalie into a marriage which does not fulfil the requirements of English law.

Godwin employs another 'plot' as he describes the way in which marriage is a manifestation of male ownership of women:

Add to this, that marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties. [...] So long as I seek to engross one woman to myself, and to prohibit my neighbour from proving his superior desert and reaping the fruits of it, I am guilty of the most odious of all monopolies. Over this imaginary prize men watch with perpetual jealousy, and one man will find his desires and his

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<sup>283</sup> Stone, *The Road to Divorce*, p. 123.

<sup>284</sup> Rebecca Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 319.

<sup>285</sup> For details of Smith's problems with the legalities of Catholic/Protestant marriage arrangements, see letters of 30 July 1793 to Bishop Douglas; 13 August 1793 to Dr Charles Burney; 21 August 1793 to Dr Charles Burney, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, pp. 63-4, 65-6, 68-70.

capacity to circumvent as much excited, as the other is excited to traverse his projects and frustrate his hopes. [...] The abolition of marriage will be attended with no evils.<sup>286</sup>

Rosalie's marital prospects are from the outset seen in terms of male ownership. She is unwittingly encouraged into her attachment to Montalbert because of her 'father's' insistence that she receive the addresses of Hughson, the ignorant and frequently drunken curate. When Hughson tries to force his unwelcome admiration upon Rosalie, she looks 'timidly towards her father for protection'. Mr Lessington, unwilling to offer this, smiles and rubs his hands as if to say 'here comes another chapman for another of my girls'. The reference to the 'chapman' [peddler] emphasises the position of Rosalie as an object of cheap exchange to be negotiated by men (p. 15). Both Rosalie's 'parents' encourage Hughson to pay frequent visits and it is this atmosphere of implied coercion to accept him as a suitor which encourages Rosalie to seek sanctuary 'like an affrighted bird' in a copse not far from the house. Her metaphorical and literal rejection of parental authority places her metaphorically and literally in the path of Montalbert, whom she meets here for the first time since their encounters eight years previously when they were both children.

Smith's detailed fictional portrayal of Montalbert's possessive and jealous guardianship of Rosalie after his marriage to her is comparable to Godwin's polemical depiction of the owner-property relationship which he sees as the basis of marriage. The emergence of Montalbert's irrational mistrust of the virtuous Rosalie is soon apparent, with 'perpetual jealousy' set in train soon after the wedding. The plan is for the couple to live in Sicily so that it is easy for Montalbert to visit his mother in Naples on several occasions and persuade her to accept his marriage to an English Protestant. He is firstly anxious about the admiration Rosalie excites as they travel through France but his jealousy subsequently becomes more acutely focused on his friend, the Count d'Alozzi, the owner of the villa in Messina where they stay. In fact, Alozzi does have designs on

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<sup>286</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, p. 50.



Rosalie, with a view perhaps to 'travers[ing] the projects' of Montalbert, but her fidelity is beyond reproach.<sup>287</sup>

Montalbert's jealousy spins further out of control later in the narrative. Following a vain search for Rosalie in the aftermath of the 1782 Sicilian earthquake, he eventually returns to England and arrives at Eastbourne, where she is living in exemplary rectitude. He hears gossip there which is the basis for his assumption that Rosalie is unfaithful to him with Walsingham, her rescuer. He sees her briefly, but 'with rage and resentment in his countenance' tells her that they must part forever. Despite her pleas for him to hear her, he leaves her and soon afterwards sends a curt note from 'H. Montalbert' giving the instruction for the 'unfortunate child' to be handed over to two lackeys who arrive at Rosalie's home (pp. 246-8). He also sends a challenge which reaches Walsingham's cousin by mistake, so that Walsingham is forced to seek out Montalbert to prevent disaster (p. 267).

Montalbert refuses to listen to him and wounds him, apparently (but not actually) fatally. Even when his 'dying' opponent releases him from any guilt in his 'killing' and swears the innocence of Rosalie 'upon the honour of a dying man', this is still insufficient to convince the headstrong and recalcitrant Montalbert (pp. 283-4). It takes the reading of a journal written by Rosalie during her isolation in the aftermath of the earthquake to convince him -- at last -- of her loyalty and fidelity and return her child to her (pp. 284-5). The narrative of the marital woes of Montalbert and Rosalie thus demonstrates the way in which the institution of marriage produces and sustains jealous male ownership of a female, a view which allies it, in this respect, with Godwin's critique.

A further important touchstone for Smith's critique of marriage in *Montalbert* is Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The latter was published by

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<sup>287</sup> Godwin's expression, quoted above, p.150.

Joseph Johnson in 1792, then revised by Wollstonecraft and published in a second edition later in the year. According to Miriam Brody, its arguments ‘found its friends and enemies, depending on how enthusiastically or suspiciously the reader viewed the great social changes being undertaken in France’.<sup>288</sup> Brody also claims that the publication of the work in France had made Wollstonecraft very popular as a champion of her sex, although ‘the conservative reaction in London was vitriolic’, with Hannah More refusing even to read the book.<sup>289</sup> As far as written criticism was concerned, however, R.M. Janes notes that the only contemporary review to produce a sustained criticism of the work on the grounds of the ‘essential inferiority and the necessary subordination of women’ was *The Critical Review* and that for the most part, those who opposed it ignored rather than virulently attacked the work.<sup>290</sup> As a measure of Smith’s political stance in relation to the status of women in *Montalbert*, Wollstonecraft’s critique of marriage in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is clearly a meaningful one. Wollstonecraft does not, however, share Godwin’s outright dismissal of the whole institution of marriage. On the contrary, although she is critical of marriages as they exist in her contemporary world and seeks to alter radically their nature, she calls marriage ‘the foundation of almost every social virtue’.<sup>291</sup>

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft’s criticisms of the present state of marriage are made within the wider context of her powerfully argued case for the need for fundamental reform of the education, treatment and social role of all women, including wives. Wollstonecraft attacks Rousseau for his depiction in *Émile*

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<sup>288</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. by Miriam Brody (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 12.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>290</sup> R.M. Janes, ‘On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39 (1978), 294. Janes notes also the reception history of Wollstonecraft’s *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) in which her attack on Marie Antoinette provoked Horace Walpole’s description of her as ‘that hyena in petticoats’.

<sup>291</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. by Janet Todd, p. 142. Such a view is not in line with Wollstonecraft’s later portrayal of marriage in her unfinished novel, *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798). However, for the purposes of this chapter, that is to locate *Montalbert* within the radical discourse of 1795, it is the already published polemic which is the touchstone here.

of the education of Sophie, which is centred upon the latter's preparation for her allotted and dependent role as a wife. The attack is part of Wollstonecraft's central argument that women have the capacity to be as rational and thereby as virtuous as men, but have been denied the chance to take an equal place in society because men have engineered it to be so. Men have encouraged women to be weak, frivolous beings, kept in a state of perpetual childhood, the prevailing opinion being that 'they were created rather to feel than to reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and their weakness'.<sup>292</sup> Translating from *Émile*, she notes Rousseau's assertion:

The first and most important qualification in a woman is good-nature or sweetness of temper; formed to obey a being so imperfect as man, often full of vices, and always full of faults, she ought to learn betimes even to suffer injustice, and to bear the insults of a husband without complaint.<sup>293</sup>

According to Wollstonecraft, men have decided upon the role of women in society and have made sure that they are conditioned both to fit into this subservient role and trained to become trivial-minded and feeble creatures, a formula which allows men to justify their own political and legal superiority and power.

Wollstonecraft compares the relationship between a woman and the patriarchal male to that of subservient subject and despotic monarch, arguing that both relationships are unacceptable:

The *divine right* of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is to be hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger, and, though conviction may not silence many boisterous disputants, yet, when any prevailing prejudice is attacked, the wise will consider, and leave the narrow-minded to rail with thoughtless vehemence at innovation.<sup>294</sup>

The narrative of *Montalbert* hinges on the despotic and arbitrary power of patriarchal society -- of the kind described by Wollstonecraft -- exerted over the female protagonists. Rosalie's marriage to Montalbert is the exchange of the authority of her

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

'father' for that of her husband: one despotic rule for another. Montalbert's obsessive and controlling behaviour reaches its zenith when he orders the peremptory taking of their infant son from her arms for reasons unknown to her. This results in what would now be termed a breakdown -- a mental and physical collapse so complete as to be life-threatening. The loss of the child and Rosalie's rapid descent towards death are a counterpoint to the scenes from the Sicilian earthquake, in which Rosalie's will to survive is largely sustained by the need to protect her child: 'Maternal love, the strongest passion that the female heart can feel, still sustained the timid and delicate Rosalie' (p. 152).

The older Rosalie is also a victim of oppression by father and husband. Before his death, her reclusive father, Old Montalbert, was in poor health and it was the lot of his only daughter to care for him, often being required to give 'constant attendance in a sick chamber'. She acknowledged that he was 'harsh', but as a dutiful daughter did not complain about the life of confinement and was still able to love him 'very tenderly' (p. 99). She fell in love with the twenty-one-year-old Ormsby, who came to stay at the house. The son of an impoverished relation of her father, he was due to sail to the East Indies to take up employment, but illness temporarily prevented this. In the meantime, until it was again the season for voyages to resume, Ormsby lived under Rosalie's father's roof. He kept at a distance from Rosalie, aware of his financial inferiority, but his growing affection for Rosalie became apparent to her in his 'looks' and 'silent attentions' (p. 101).

The relationship suddenly intensified when the young couple met by chance in the garden, outside the confines of the patriarchal family home, a meeting which parallels that of the younger Rosalie and Montalbert. Ormsby quickly declared his 'violent, though hopeless passion', their mutual love and youthful optimism quickly over-rode their judgement and they became lovers (p. 102). The relationship was soon

replaced by the enforced marriage to Mr Vyvian, and like her daughter, the older Rosalie exchanged the rule of one despotic male for another. The older Rosalie is forced to relate this story to the younger Rosalie, whom she incorrectly fears is in love with Charles Vyvian, her hitherto unacknowledged biological brother.

The long lasting and unrelieved unhappiness of the older Rosalie's marriage to Mr Vyvian is contrasted with the possible happiness she might have enjoyed. The younger Rosalie reflects on the fact that had the older Montalbert died only slightly sooner than was the case, her mother would have been 'at liberty, and her life would not have passed in the miseries of such a marriage' and her parents 'might in a happy union have effaced the remembrance of their early indiscretion' (p. 131).

In the course of her lengthy analysis of the injustice of women's treatment by society, Wollstonecraft warns of the dangers of marriage entered into on the basis of physical attraction, recognising that the courtship which precedes it flourishes in an atmosphere of heady excitement, obstacles and difficulties, the kind of courtship which won Rosalie for Montalbert:

Love, the common passion, in which chance and sensation take the place of choice and reason, is, in some degree, felt by the mass of mankind. [...] This passion, naturally increased by suspense and difficulties, draws the mind out of its accustomed state, and exalts the affections.<sup>295</sup>

Wollstonecraft returns later to her attack on this kind of affection as a basis for marriage and to choices made upon the basis of external qualities of manners or physical attraction:

Love is, in a great degree, an arbitrary passion, and will reign, like other stalking mischiefs, by its own authority, without deigning to reason; and it may also be distinguished from esteem, the foundation of friendship, because it is often excited by evanescent beauties and graces. [...]

Men look for beauty and the simper of good-humoured docility: women are captivated by easy manners; a gentleman-like man seldom fails to please them. [...]

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

In the choice of a husband, they should not be led astray by the qualities of a lover ---  
for a lover the husband, even supposing him to be wise and virtuous, cannot long remain.<sup>296</sup>

Further similarities to Wollstonecraft's feminist critique are found in Smith's treatment of those women who fall outside the confines of marriage, either 'fallen' women or those born out of wedlock. By utilising a 'fallen' woman and her illegitimate child as her central characters, Smith moves into a position more radical than in any of her previous novels. Attitudes to 'fallen' women are challenged by Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, an expression of this view unexpectedly placed just after she has expressed her respect for marriage:

Still, highly as I respect marriage, as the foundation of almost every social virtue, I cannot help feeling the most lively compassion for those unfortunate females who are broken off from society, and by one error torn from all those affections and relationships that improve the heart and mind. It does not frequently even deserve the name of error, for many innocent girls become the dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and still more are, as it may emphatically be termed, *ruined* before they know the difference between virtue and vice: -- and thus prepared by their education for infamy, they become infamous.<sup>297</sup>

Wollstonecraft here defends what Eve Tavor Bannet terms the 'truth and troth' of unions which are not legal marriages.<sup>298</sup> Although after the passing of the Hardwick Marriage Act marriage was the only legally-binding contract of co-habitation, this should not mean that informal unions of the kind which were acceptable before it, and which were based on affection and respect, should be subject to moral stricture. The faults were with society and not with the affectionate heart of the 'fallen' woman.<sup>299</sup>

The portrayal of the older Rosalie is in line with this view. Smith emphasises Rosalie's naivety and indeed that of Ormsby in assuming that Old Montalbert would ultimately give consent to their marriage. Rosalie says that Ormsby 'was not an artful

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., pp.194-5.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., pp.142-3.

<sup>298</sup> Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 108.

<sup>299</sup> For a detailed examination of the effects of the Hardwick Marriage Act on the novelistic discourse of the period, see Bannet, pp 108-24.

seducer; but I had no mother, I had no friend, and those who reflect on my situation will surely compassionate, though they may not perhaps acquit me'. The only words of opprobrium come from Rosalie herself as she refers to her 'deviation from rectitude and honour', and, predictably, from her father when he organised Ormsby's banishment (p.104). Old Montalbert never learned of the pregnancy but was able to work up a ferocious level of anger on the grounds of the lovers' meetings and desire to marry. His anger was centred not only on the fact that the couple had met without his 'approbation', but that she had dared to think of 'a boy, who though distantly my relation and therefore a gentleman, is a beggar', grounds which are to do with matters social and economic, of property and the challenge to authority, rather than moral or religious considerations (p. 105).

The fictional form of Smith's marriage critique has a substantial advantage over polemic in persuading the reader to consider the injustices of social mores as they apply to women. Whereas Wollstonecraft reports on her own 'compassion', Smith is able to elicit the compassion of the reader as she tells of the way in which the older Rosalie's behaviour is dictated by her sincere, affectionate heart. The older Rosalie is presented throughout as a figure deserving sympathy and there is no undermining ambivalence to suggest that her behaviour should be denigrated. The fact that she is slowly approaching death as she tells her story to her daughter enables Smith to wring further pathos from the story. Rosalie's behaviour is presented as a social error made in the name of love and paid for with a life of unhappiness to assuage the anger of a despotic father.

In *Montalbert*, Smith moves beyond her sympathetic presentation of 'fallen' women in *Celestina* and *Desmond*. Emily Cathcart, Lady Adelina and Josephine Boisbelle, unlike the two Rosalies, are not the heroines or central to the action of the novels, but, as has been previously demonstrated, operate either on their periphery, or as

part of an ambivalent paralleling or both.<sup>300</sup> The case for the undermining of a dominant ideology is more difficult to make in *Celestina* or *Desmond* than in *Montalbert*; in the latter, Smith moves much further towards an open challenge to expected norms by moving the doubling of the two Rosalies into the heart of the narrative.

The choice of an illegitimate heroine is also a more radical stage in a process traceable in earlier novels. Smith had previously used the putative illegitimacy of her heroines as an attempt to separate virtue from dependency on class, rank and wealth; it was a way of showing that the heroine was truly virtuous in her own right. Thus Emmeline is thought to be an illegitimate nobody until late in the novel, when she is revealed to be the legitimate heir to Mowbray Castle. Similarly, *Celestina*'s origins are initially mysterious, but ultimately revealed as noble. The flirtation with the notion of a heroine of illegitimate birth is in both cases shut down by the conventions of the courtship novel and it is a radical departure in *Montalbert* that the heroine, the illegitimate younger Rosalie, is not redeemed into legitimacy in the final volume. Smith resists the safety of the expected and conventional ending, further proof of this novel's rejection of conventional mores.

Ultimately, the novel offers a sophisticated and disturbing interrogation of marriage in the 1790s. Although the narratives of the two Rosalies seem in some ways to be set up as mirror images, Smith's deliberate ambivalence is such that each also partly undermines the other. It is clear that marriages based on the edict of a despotic father are condemned outright, but there is no simple answer to the question of whether marriages based on passion are any better. The first generation 'marriage' based on forbidden passion encourages the reader's sympathy and seems to offer the potential for happiness. Whether the relationship could have been successful and enduring is not known, since the dictates of an autocratic father replace it with a profoundly unhappy

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<sup>300</sup> See above, Chapter 2, pp. 28-9; Chapter 3, p. 43; Chapter 4, pp. 82-3.



marriage. The second generation relationship, also based on forbidden passion, is the cause of the undeserved unhappiness of the virtuous heroine. In the doubled narratives of the two Rosalies, Smith develops in an innovative and iconoclastic way the techniques of narrative doubling which she employs in such novels as *Emmeline* and *Celestina*, so that in *Montalbert* the doubling leads to a stasis, a sense that there is perhaps no resolution to the problem of women's quest for fulfilment in marriage in late-eighteenth-century society.

Whereas *The Banished Man* ended with two happy trans-national marriages and an Italian idyll, albeit temporary, for most of the protagonists, in *Montalbert* the perceived idyll becomes a tale of Gothic oppression and the marital resolution haunted by different possibilities. Making *Montalbert* half-Italian gives Smith the opportunity to draw on contemporary, contradictory perceptions of Italy as both sensual and oppressive. He is able to use Italian to write a love-letter to Rosalie under the guise of copying a song, since no one else understands the language; however, he also acts as a Gothic tyrant, seconded by a mother whose autocratic treatment of Rosalie is made to mirror the authoritarianism and hierarchy of the Catholic Church (p. 48). Rosalie's first impressions of Italy in *Montalbert*, as a place of idyllic beauty and tranquillity, where she might have 'fancied herself in paradise', are counteracted by the later ones of the desolation of the Sicilian earthquake, the terrors of Calabria, and the cruelties of the *Montalbert* mother and son (p. 142). Craciun has argued that Smith increasingly moves towards the achievement of a cosmopolitan ideal which transcends national boundaries, often representing this through trans-national marriages.<sup>301</sup> However, in *Montalbert* it is the case that rather than finding safety in the cosmopolitan and the trans-national, it is for England and the English language Rosalie yearns during her suffering, soothed by

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<sup>301</sup> See Chapter 5 above, p. 137.

the sight of the sea, which she describes as ‘the only medium by which I could reach my native land’, and it is an Englishman, Walsingham, who is her salvation (pp. 148, 175). Rosalie is rescued by him when he is wandering the world as a way of recovering from the death of Leonora, the woman he had hoped to marry. He happens to disembark on the coast where Rosalie is allowed to walk, engineers a daring escape and then escorts her back to England.

It might be argued that Smith does attempt to rescue the institution of marriage in a paragraph of two sentences in the final chapter of the novel where the prognosis for the rest of the younger Rosalie’s married life is given:

Montalbert enjoyed, at a small but beautiful place on the coast of Dorsetshire, with which Ormsby had presented his wife, more happiness than usually falls to the lot of humanity. Rosalie passed her life in studying how to contribute to his felicity, and that of her father, and, by her sweetness and attention, she won from them both those little asperities and difference of temper which had once threatened to destroy their domestic comfort. (p. 290)

The first sentence describes Montalbert’s happiness, and after the good news about his domestic comfort, there follows a single sentence about Rosalie’s ‘happiness’, which is depicted in terms of her contribution to the ‘felicity’ of her husband and father. Rosalie could now be the clone of Rousseau’s Sophie, able to suffer the insults of her husband without complaint because of the sweetness of her temper. With Montalbert’s cruelty reduced to ‘little asperities’, Smith appears to reapply the rules of patriarchal society and return to the expected resolution of the courtship novel: marriage and life in a landed estate.

It is difficult, however, to maintain that Smith’s single paragraph return to the patriarchal ideal is other than minimal and nominal and that the questioning and subversive treatment of traditional marriage in the novel as a whole is outweighed or denied by such a frail resolution. In fact, it is very significant that Smith does not end the novel with this paragraph of lip-service to society’s status quo. Instead, the

following, final two paragraphs are focused on the fate of Walsingham, whom Smith has portrayed as a man of integrity and compassion. The most admirable male in the novel is absent from the group gathered at the landed estate as well as from the marriage resolution. Instead, his role as a wanderer disrupts closure and brings a sense of disturbance to the conclusion of the novel:

But notwithstanding the cheerful and even gay letters which Walsingham wrote to his friends, letters which greatly contributed to the happiness of Rosalie, who retained for him the most grateful regard, he was still an unhappy wanderer; and when he had done all he could to restore Montalbert to his mother's favour, and was no longer animated by the hope of serving Rosalie, he sunk again into that cold despondence, which a sensible heart feels when the world around is as a desert. The agonies which he had wept over the grave of his Leonora had been suspended by the almost imperceptible attachment which had crept into his bosom for Rosalie, and which he had indulged but too much, after there appeared some probability that Montalbert was no more.

The last letters he wrote to England informed his friends that he was setting out on a tour through Spain and Portugal; and that finding himself more than ever disposed to wander, he thought it not improbable but that he might go from thence to the Cape, and so to the East Indies. -- In the pursuit of science and knowledge he found consolation, when no benevolent action offered itself to satisfy his philanthropy; but so generally is misery diffused, that there were few places which did not offer objects for this indulgence -- though none could interest him like the amiable Being whom he had released from the dreary confinement of Formiscusa, and restored to the possession of the happiness she now enjoyed -- a happiness which alone could soften the sadness of his own destiny!!! (pp. 290-1)

This focus on the fate of Walsingham promotes pity, a sense of injustice and a comparison between him and Montalbert. Even a reviewer in the anti-radical periodical, *The British Critic*, felt a 'sensation of anger' at an ending which saw the restoration of Rosalie to so unworthy a husband.<sup>302</sup> The unworthiness of Montalbert makes it difficult not to make a further comparison, namely between the 'happiness' which Rosalie now enjoys, and the happiness she might have enjoyed had she married the virtuous

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<sup>302</sup> *The British Critic* (February, 1796), p. 128.

Walsingham. Fletcher, for example, claims that ‘the reader can see that he is the hero she should have married’.<sup>303</sup>

Rosalie is not released from her sentence of marriage by an easy novelistic solution such as the death of Montalbert and the prospect of Walsingham as his superior replacement husband. Instead, the reader is left to consider the poignancy of the final paragraphs of the novel, which undermines further any resolution of its interrogation of marriage. Craciun argues that the conclusion ‘quietly pleads for divorce’ because the obviously faulty marriage of Rosalie and Montalbert is left *in situ*, a view endorsed by Fletcher who claims that that Smith advocates divorce ‘but only by implication’.<sup>304</sup>

It is possible to argue that in this novel Smith advocates the reform of divorce law. However, I suggest that her main focus is not on how individual marriages might be ended, but on how marriage as an institution might be improved. She focuses on the ways in which patriarchy dictates marital choice. Both Rosalies are shown to be at the mercy of despotic fatherly authority and victims of a society which denies them the knowledge and power to make informed choices. Unsuitable and unhappy unions, such as those exemplified in these stories are therefore only to be expected. The answer to the problem of unhappy marriages is therefore the dismantling of patriarchy through radical changes to law and social custom rather than simply changes to the laws governing divorce. This critique of marriage in *Montalbert* is part of Smith’s far-reaching and general criticism of patriarchal systems, which extends through her novels as a whole.

Smith offers a glimpse of what might have been a successful marriage through the depiction of Rosalie’s relationship with Walsingham, one based on mutual esteem, mutual respect and mutual knowledge. The relationship has some affinities with those marriages described by Wollstonecraft when she explores the possibilities of a future in which women have been educated differently and live in a society which encourages

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<sup>303</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 245.

<sup>304</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, ed. by Curran and Craciun, p. xviii; Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 245.

their rational thought. In some 'future revolution of time', they would not be 'led astray by the qualities of a lover' and would therefore enter marriage wisely and with different expectations:

Were women more rationally educated, could they take a more comprehensive view of things, they would be content to love but once in their lives; and after marriage calmly let passion subside into friendship -- into that tender intimacy, which is the best refuge from care; yet is built on such pure, still affections, that idle jealousies would not be allowed to disturb the discharge of the sober duties of life.<sup>305</sup>

Smith's critique of marriage, unlike that of Godwin, does not suggest that marriage should be abolished but, like Wollstonecraft, neither does she leave the reader satisfied with marriage in its present state. There is a prevailing sense, in both Wollstonecraft's polemical text and Smith's novel, of a problem identified and understood but as yet unresolved. Wollstonecraft's polemic claims that matters would remain thus until society changed, until there was a 'revolution in female manners'.<sup>306</sup> Smith's novel does not offer a polemically stated solution, but similarly suggests that the society in which she lives and which she portrays in her novels ensures that the chances of happiness in marriage are minimal. For Smith as well as for Wollstonecraft, the problem remains and it is effective that the ending of *Montalbert* is marked not by closure but by a sense of elusive happiness just out of reach. The sending of the married Rosalie and Montalbert to the novelistic safety of the country estate may be in keeping with courtship novel conventions, but marriage is no longer the resolution of the novel; on the contrary it is the centre of turmoil. The issues remain in the province of debate and the turbulence and radicalism of the marriage critique is not here quelled by the imposition of the restraints of the courtship novel conventions.

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<sup>305</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. by Janet Todd, p. 195.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p.113.

## Chapter Seven

### Defending Free Speech against Government Repression:

#### *Marchmont* (1796)

With her next novel, *Marchmont*, published in 1796, Smith repeats the strategy of *Montalbert* by centring the narrative upon a dispossessed young heroine who refuses to be coerced into a grotesquely unsuitable marriage by her patriarchal protector.<sup>307</sup> However, although the plot is constructed so that the heroine, Althea Dacres, marries Armyn Marchmont instead, an appropriately virtuous young man of sensibility and rank, the marriage plot is subsumed into and subsidiary to a critique of the state of the nation in the latter part of the 1790s. Smith's advocacy of social and legal change in *Montalbert* continued to align her with radical writers and speakers, who were the targets of the government restrictions on free speech. It is in the shadow of the most stringent of these restrictions that Smith composed her last two complete novels, *Marchmont* itself and *The Young Philosopher* (1798), in which her opposition to what contemporaries often called 'Pitt's Reign of Terror' is voiced.

The passing in December 1795 of the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act, often referred to as the Two Acts or the Gagging Acts, was the climax of government attempts to suppress political radicalism. The first Act redefined and extended the definition of high treason to include conspiracy to bring the King or his government into contempt. This applied to both the written and the spoken word and applied even if no action resulted from either. The second Act curtailed the

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<sup>307</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Marchmont* (1796), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 9, ed. by Kate Davies and Harriet Guest. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

right to assembly; it included imposing a ban on meetings with more than fifty people and made it punishable by death if more than twelve persons refused to disperse after being directed to do so by the authorities.<sup>308</sup> According to Gregory Claeys, it now 'became a high misdemeanour to publish anything likely to incite hatred or contempt of the King, government or constitution, which made it possible to prosecute anything but the most fulsome praise'. Moreover, 'to mention in the street that a reform of parliament might be desirable was to invite being hauled up before a magistrate'.<sup>309</sup> The Acts were passed in the wake of the Treason Trials of 1794, which had seen the acquittal of Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke and John Thelwall. The Acts were also a reaction to increasing agitation and public disorder, including an alleged attack on the King's life when a projectile thrown by a member of a mob broke the window of his coach as he travelled to Parliament.<sup>310</sup> Speakers, writers and publishers with politically radical sympathies worked in fear of accusations of sedition or treason, in anxiety over the hidden presence of government spies and informers and with the knowledge that future prosecutions for treason would be unlikely to fail, given the stringency of the new legislation.

The fear of prosecution on the part of publishers and writers during the period is illustrated by the history of the Preface which Godwin wrote for *Things As They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794).<sup>311</sup> This Preface was not actually published in 1794. Godwin claimed in an additional Preface, which was written in October 1795 and published in the second edition of the novel (after the acquittal of Hardy, Tooke and Thelwall), that the first Preface had been withdrawn 'in compliance

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<sup>308</sup> For a detailed account of the Gagging Acts, see John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, pp. 574-603.

<sup>309</sup> *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. by Claeys, vol. 1, p. xlv.

<sup>310</sup> See Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, pp. 555-8.

<sup>311</sup> William Godwin, *Things As They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, 3 vols (London: B. Crosby, 1794).

with the alarms of booksellers'.<sup>312</sup> Both Prefaces were published in this edition of the novel (1796), the first edition not having resulted in the prosecution of publisher or author.<sup>313</sup> According to Godwin, the novel had first been published when 'Terror was the order of the day; and it was feared that even the humble novelist might be shown constructively to be a traitor'.<sup>314</sup>

Smith was dependent upon the income from her novels and needed to ensure that rejection by concerned publishers did not cause this income to fail. She makes reference in *Marchmont* to the difficult environment for writers when the hero is considering trying to make money by writing whilst in prison. He comments:

It was besides very probable, that the principal dealers in literary traffic would hesitate at purchasing the work of a prisoner who was likely [...] to vent in his writing some part of the discontent that imprisonment is apt to engender. -- The passage from discontent to murmurs against the oppression real or imaginary, is very short; and murmurs may savour of seditious notions and seditious notions might carry a man nobody knew whither. What rich and substantial vender [of books] would hazard any thing like this in these times? (p. 383)

Godwin protested against both the Treason Trials and the Gagging Acts, a protest which was part of his continuing personal battle against attempts to stifle the expression of anti-government sentiments. An important part of his assault on government repression and the trials of radicals was a series of letters to the *Morning Chronicle* in February and March 1794. These letters are usually termed the *Letters of Mucius*, after the pseudonym which he employed. Later, he argued against the legality of charges made against the defendants in the Treason Trials of 1794, presenting his case in *Cursory Strictures on the Charge Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the*

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<sup>312</sup> William Godwin, *Things As They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, 3 vols (London: G.G.& J. Robinson, 1796) p. vii.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. v-vii.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.



*Grand Jury* in 1794.<sup>315</sup> In 1795, in *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices and Unlawful Assemblies*, he presented a case for the rejection of the terms of the Gagging Acts.<sup>316</sup>

*Marchmont* was therefore written in a political climate in which radicals were protesting against government repression. It is the specificities of this discourse which inform this novel, as well as more generally the desire for social and legal reform which characterises all Smith's novels in the 1790s. In *Marchmont*, the protest against the repression of free speech is conveyed through images of the English Civil War and the history of the Marchmont family's support for the royalist cause, which are embedded in a wider exposé of the injustice and inequality of a corrupt legal system. The novel rejects the attempt to silence all but conformist views, and asserts the case for liberty of expression.

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Much modern criticism has recognised that Smith pursues a political agenda in *Marchmont* and locates this agenda in her ferocious attack on the corruption of the law and in the atmosphere of surveillance which is a feature of this novel and which, in real life, accompanied the government crackdown on radicals.

The corruption of the law is indeed an important concern in this work and it is flagged up by Smith in her Preface, in which she expresses her distress at her unsuccessful battles to obtain the money left to her in her father-in-law's will. She blames lawyers for this and for the consequent death of her daughter, Anna Augusta:

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<sup>315</sup> William Godwin, *Cursory Strictures on the Charges Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the Grand Jury, October 2, 1794. First Published in the Morning Chronicle, October 21* (London: D.I. Eaton, 1794).

<sup>316</sup> William Godwin, *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices and Unlawful Assemblies* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1795), repr. in *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. by Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto 1993), pp.124-62.

But notwithstanding that, by unremitting labour, I have existed, the consequences of the robbery committed on me and my children have been fatal; and after having resisted, for twelve years, difficulties and distresses such as women are seldom called upon to encounter, *one* dreadful evil has overtaken me, and nearly overwhelmed me -- that lovely Being who was the greatest blessing of my life has been torn from me forever[...] and this last and bitterest calamity I shall ever impute to the conduct of our inhuman oppressors. (p. 3)

Her invective against lawyers becomes more intense as she describes firstly her delineation of a lawyer, a major character of the novel, and then attacks the integrity of the legal profession as a whole:

I have no hesitation in saying, that in the present work the character most odious (and that only) is drawn *ad vivum*. [...] It has been observed to me that such an obscure wretch as an attorney, remarkable only for his skill in saving the ears he has so often deserved to lose, is too contemptible for satire. As an individual he is; but as a specimen of a genus extremely poisonous and noxious he becomes an object to be held up to detestation. [...] Armed with the power of doing mischief, and of robbing legally -- the wretch without feeling or principle, without honesty or pity -- is a nuisance widely diffused, and spreading frequent desolation (pp. 4-5).

Smith does, however, add one qualification to her diatribe against lawyers:

That there are honest and good men in the profession I believe, for I know *two*, but I have reason to suppose that the majority are so much otherwise, that it would be well if they were restrained by means more adequate to the purpose than those ever practised in *the present order of things*. (p. 5)

Carrol Fry and Loraine Fletcher agree that the 'odious' character to whom Smith is referring here is a fictionalisation of John Robinson, one of the trustees of Richard Smith's will, although whether he is the model for the character of Mohun or Vampyre, both corrupt and ruthless representatives of the law, is open to debate.<sup>317</sup> Kate Davies and Harriet Guest, who also comment on the novel's assault on legal corruption, suggest that Sir John Dyer, another trustee of the will, is an object of Smith's attacks (p. 420). Whatever the precise connections between the real and the fictitious may be, the novel

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<sup>317</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 251; Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 102.

certainly shows how, as Eve Tavor Bannet puts it, ‘the law was being capriciously manipulated by dishonest lawyers to serve men of property and power’.<sup>318</sup>

Of the two honest lawyers mentioned, one is certainly the great defence lawyer, Thomas Erskine, who helped Smith during 1794 and 1795 with her lifelong legal struggles over the money tied up in her deceased father-in-law’s estate.<sup>319</sup> This veiled reference to Erskine is the first indication of Smith’s personal connections to those engaged in contemporary battles against the suppression of freedom of speech, since it was Erskine who had defended Tom Paine over the publication of the *Rights of Man* and he had played a major part, whilst acting for the defence, in the 1794 Treason Trials, which resulted in the acquittal of all the accused.

Several modern critics argue that the novel’s critique of the workings of the law is part of a wider political discourse. They locate its critique in events and associated polemics in which questions of the integrity of the law were central. For example, Fry draws attention to Smith’s condemnation of the ‘flaws of the British legal system’ arguing that she is ‘remarkably explicit’ about them, considering the repressive atmosphere of the time.<sup>320</sup> Davies and Guest maintain that the novel’s comment on debtors’ law contributes to the general debate about the treatment of debtors which had been fired by Lord Rawdon’s attempt to pass a Bill to put an end to the existing system. They also convincingly argue that Smith’s view of the law is ‘supported by’ Vicesimus Knox’s *The Spirit of Despotism* (1795), which linked the corruption of the law directly to the increase of the despotic power of government (pp. xi, xvi).<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution*, p. 192.

<sup>319</sup> See Smith, *Collected Letters*, pp. 175, 185, 186. For an account of Erskine, see David Lemmings, ‘Erskine, Thomas, first Baron Erskine (1750-1823)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, January 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8873>> [accessed on 8 June 2011].

<sup>320</sup> Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 102.

<sup>321</sup> For a further account of the arguments of Knox’s *Spirit of Despotism*, see Harriet Guest, ‘Suspicious Minds: Spies and Surveillance in Charlotte Smith’s Novels of the 1790s’, in *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740–1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste*, ed. by Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask and David Simpson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 169–87.

As John Barrell explains, *The Spirit of Despotism*, written by a respected head-teacher, the writer of previous essays on education, literature and religion, was so outspoken in its attack on aristocratic corruption and the Pitt government that it ‘appeared anonymously, with no publisher’s name on the title-page, and was circulated privately, if at all’, not re-appearing in England until 1821.<sup>322</sup> The publication history of *The Spirit of Despotism* is evidence of the validity of the critique which Knox’s text delivers. It also reinforces further the argument of this chapter that in *Marchmont*, Smith was working in an environment which she needed to avoid direct criticism of the government.

Like modern critics, contemporaries also commented on Smith’s exposé of the law. Although they did not, as a rule, approve of the way in which she included autobiographical details in Prefaces and narratives, they seem to have made greater allowance in the case of *Marchmont*, probably because her view of the legal profession struck a chord with the reviewers. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft, in a short piece in *The Analytical Review*, writes, ‘Her manner, indeed, of alluding to her domestic sorrows must excite sympathy, and excuse the acrimony with which she execrates, and holds up to contempt, the man to whom she attributes them’, adding that ‘the design of showing the misery, which unprincipled men of the law may bring on the innocent, is well imagined’.<sup>323</sup> *The Monthly Review* considers that, ‘If the iniquities committed by means of our system of laws occupy a large part, and perhaps encroach too much on the conclusion of the story, the author’s personal circumstances and misfortunes may well form a sufficient apology’. Like Wollstonecraft, the reviewer (Arthur Aiken) implies that Smith’s personal experience is symptomatic of a general problem: ‘The tediousness, chicane, and uncertainty of many of our law proceedings’, easily perverted

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<sup>322</sup> For an account of the publishing history and content of Knox’s *Spirit of Despotism*, see John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 4-8.

<sup>323</sup> *The Analytical Review*, 25 (May, 1797), p. 523.

by 'the rich and unprincipled', become 'engines of the most cruel oppression' and 'form the leading character of this work.'<sup>324</sup>

Smith's treatment of the oppression of the law is organised around the fate of Armyn Marchmont and the machinations of two corrupt and ruthless representatives of the legal profession, Mohun and Vampyre. Marchmont's involvement with the law begins with the death of his father, who died insolvent, leaving his son to take on the burden of the debt and the financial support of his mother and sisters. The family are the ancestral owners of the estate of Eastwoodleigh but lost the bulk of their wealth during the periods of the English Civil War and the Jacobite rebellions, throughout which they supported the cause of the Stuart monarchy.

Mohun, who aspires to become Lord Chancellor, is a friend of Althea's father, Sir Audley Dacres. Their relationship is one of mutually corrupt interest and epitomises the way in which the integrity of both the legislature and the judiciary was compromised. Sir Audley uses Mohun to help him in various transactions, political and private; Mohun depends upon the patronage of Sir Audley, who 'possessed two boroughs', for his parliamentary seat (p. 77). Mortgages on the house and estate of Eastwoodleigh and other property owned by the Marchmont family had been held by the father of Althea's stepmother, Lady Dacres, then inherited by Lady Dacres, who foreclosed on the owner. Mohun gains the lease of one of these other properties and refuses to allow Marchmont's mother and sisters to remain there, although Marchmont is trying to find ways of raising money to pay some of the debts incurred by his father. Mohun also personally pursues Althea, with the approval of her father, with the intention of marrying her, and later, in league with Lady Dacres, is instrumental in illegally blocking two inheritances to which Althea is entitled, one from her now deceased father and another from the aunt who had taken care of her throughout her

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<sup>324</sup> *The Monthly Review*, 22 (April, 1797), p. 468.

childhood. For Althea, 'Mohun rose as a fiend destined to persecute her, and to oppress him' [Marchmont] (p. 60).

Vampyre, an attorney, is employed by Marchmont's creditors and pursues him for the family debts, going to the lengths of illegally attempting to claim the body of Marchmont's father on its way to burial, presumably with a view to selling the corpse to anatomists (p. 123). Ultimately, through the joint machinations of both Vampyre and Mohun, Marchmont is incarcerated in the King's Bench prison. Reflecting later on the behaviour of both men, Marchmont's verdict is that the 'Robespierres and Dantons of France' were 'less systematic scoundrels than either of these' (p. 407). The comparison has particular force given that Marchmont had previously journeyed to France, travelling from Paris to Toulon in an unsuccessful attempt to gain financial help from his great-uncle. Early in this journey, in July 1793, he had been in Paris and witnessed the scenes 'of phrensy and horror' which marked the beginning of the Reign of Terror (p. 247).

Tellingly, Vampyre's pursuit of Marchmont is conducted in a manner very similar to Gines's pursuit of Caleb Williams. There is no evidence that Smith had read *Caleb Williams* at this time, although later, during the composition of *The Young Philosopher*, she wrote to a bookseller requesting a copy, possibly because she was concerned that one of her characters would 'be thought an imitation'.<sup>325</sup> Fletcher asserts that she did not read the novel 'until long after *Marchmont* was finished', presumably using this letter as the basis for this statement.<sup>326</sup> The congruence between these novels therefore suggests that their narratives of a corrupt law and ruthless surveillance and pursuit in its name have common roots in the contemporary political environment.

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<sup>325</sup> Letter of 1 August 1797 to George Robinson and Co; letter of 1 August 1797 to Thomas Cadell, Jr. and William Davies, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, pp. 285, 284.

<sup>326</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 252.

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Whilst acknowledging that Smith uses the corruption of the law and the atmosphere of surveillance as ways of commenting on the state of the nation, I would argue that critical works which concentrate on these aspects have not recognised fully the political implications of her shadowing of the narrative with references to the English Civil War and its aftermath, or that this technique is of major importance in her promotion of a radical anti-government agenda in *Marchmont*. The most intriguing questions to be asked about *Marchmont* are why Smith chooses to permeate this novel with references to the English Civil War and subsequent royalist history and what, for Smith's contemporaries, might be the implications of their haunting presence in a novel published in 1796. Fletcher thinks that Smith 'takes the Civil War as the starting point to examine the need for reconciliation between opposed interests' although she recognises that 'compromise is unlikely'.<sup>327</sup> Jane Spencer notes that the novel 'joins the debate over the meaning of seventeenth-century history through which eighteenth-century political issues were frequently discussed', although she does not explore the connections which were made between the Civil War and the 1790s by writers of polemic.<sup>328</sup> She argues that Smith is interested in the effect of the history of the earlier period on the characters in the present of the novel and that she uses the historical references 'both to comment on the seventeenth-century revolution, and to indicate the importance of rereading history in its personal and family aspects'.<sup>329</sup> Both *Marchmont* and *Althea* are 'freed from a past shaped by fathers' and become the representatives of a new social attitude which can 'value the past without being trapped by it'.<sup>330</sup> In contrast,

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<sup>327</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 251.

<sup>328</sup> Jane Spencer, 'Women Writers and the Eighteenth-Century Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 228.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

Davies and Guest argue that the Civil War references contribute to what they identify as a primary concern of the novel: 'the effects of mistaken loyalty on private life, which reflect obliquely on the more immediate effects of Pitt's "Reign of Terror"'. They suggest that the technique emphasises the 'futility of political attachment in a world of suffering individuals' (pp. xvi, xviii).

The general claim that the Civil War provides a melancholy backdrop of disappointed allegiances and their effect on individuals can indeed be supported further by noting the connection which Marchmont makes between himself and Richard Lovelace. Althea lives for a time at Eastwoodleigh, banished there by her father, Sir Audley Dacres who has sent her to live there as a punishment for refusing to marry Mohun. At Eastwoodleigh, she encounters Marchmont, who is hiding from Vampyre and his cronies in the deserted house. During their secret conversations, he asks Althea whether she knows the poem 'To Althea, From Prison', by the Cavalier poet, Richard Lovelace. He claims him as a distant relative, describing both of them as part of that 'race, of which many members have been imprisoned', although not for 'quite the same cause' (p. 157).

Yet Smith's primary reason for pervading the narrative with images of the Civil War and subsequent royalist history is arguably also political and highly topical. She uses the historical frame of the Civil War as a screening device for her polemical protest at the curtailment of liberty which the Gagging Acts had inflicted; it is a form of encoded defiance which evades the danger of prosecution. In *Marchmont*, as in *The Old Manor House*, she uses historical shadows and references which are not essential to the narrative thrust, but which have political significance. Just as in *The Old Manor House* the use of the chivalric romance could for some readers serve as a reminder of the contemporary polemical discourse in which it also featured, so too in *Marchmont* do the references to the Civil War and subsequent events bring with them a complex political



freight, one with particular resonance during the period of the Treason Trials and the Gagging Acts. This is because the topic of the Civil War inevitably aired problems concerning the legitimacy of the institution of monarchy and the extent of its power.

Debates about monarchy, including whether tyrannical monarchs should be replaced by their subjects and whether the institution of monarchy should be abolished altogether, were central to the Civil War period itself. These debates were re-invigorated after 1789, a discourse which was reproduced in the fictional debates of *Desmond*. However, when Smith was writing *Marchmont* and *The Young Philosopher*, between 1795 and 1798, this subject matter was now suppressed by legislation, a situation which prompted a second question: whether government had the right to silence that debate. It should be stressed that Smith did not wish to bring down the English monarchy or to see the execution of George III, although such an extreme view was not without its supporters, as is evidenced by pamphlets such as *The Happy Reign of George the Last* (1795).<sup>331</sup> Rather, the novel invites the reader to continue to exercise the right to consider and discuss political issues concerning monarchy and the relationship between the individual, parliament and the monarch, discussions which were forbidden by the Gagging Acts. Although there is no overt discussion of these forbidden political topics Smith permeates the novel with them through frequent and persistent reference to the history of Civil War and its aftermath. The novel is thus, in part, a political statement about the right to debate matters of constitutional import and to express opinion without fear of the oppression of the law.

There is much evidence to suggest that lengthy and detailed evocation of the Civil War period, as is the case in *Marchmont*, would automatically trigger these associations. The period was used as a template for the constitutional battles between radicals and loyalists in the period immediately following the outbreak of the French

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<sup>331</sup> Anon, *The Happy Reign of George the Last* (London: printed for Citizen Lee, 1795).

Revolution. The Revolution Society, to whose members Richard Price delivered his sermon *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* in 1789, to which Edmund Burke responded in *Reflections*, saw the Civil War as part of a political narrative, an important landmark in the process which led towards the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. For Price, the events in France in 1789 seemed to emulate those of the 1688 revolution because the French monarchy was no longer despotic. By setting up the National Assembly, France had actually moved beyond England to an even more just representation of the people's will.

In Price's sermon and Burke's emotional response, the connections between the Civil War, the French Revolution and the implications for England's future are clearly forged, with the figures of three monarchs at the heart of the discourse. Thus Price celebrates the removal of Louis XVI from Versailles to Paris in October, 1789, quoting from the *Nunc Dimittis* to describe his own peace of mind concerning recent events in France, and describing the 'king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects'.<sup>332</sup> He explains that 'a King is no more than the first servant of the public': he is 'created by it, maintained by it, and responsible to it'. Price enjoins George III to consider himself 'more properly the Servant than the Sovereign' of his people, although he insists that obedience to laws and to representatives of the law, including kings, is part of one's duty to one's country, a way of ensuring that a community does not fall 'into a state of anarchy that will destroy those rights and subvert that liberty, which government is instituted to protect'.<sup>333</sup> Burke's attack on Price argues in favour of the hereditary and immutable nature of monarchy, which is empowered by a 'fixed rule of succession' and expounded upon at length throughout *Reflections*, in strenuous opposition to the notion of kings being the servants of the

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<sup>332</sup> Price, *Discourse*, p. 49.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-28.

people.<sup>334</sup> As part of this attack, Burke makes a direct link to the events of the Civil War when he compares Price's sermon to that of the Reverend Hugh Peters in the king's chapel in 1648. Peters, an Independent clergyman who was eventually executed for assisting in the beheading of Charles I, is described as 'a predecessor of Dr Price' and as having delivered the only previous example in England of a sermon in the same 'strain'.<sup>335</sup> The link is made more powerful and emotive when Burke elaborates upon the scene of Charles I's trial. Peters reputedly rode before the king 'triumphing', in a way reminiscent of Price's description of the crowds leading Louis XVI and, like Price, he had quoted from the *Nunc Dimittis*.<sup>336</sup>

Burke's response to Price is far from unique in this historical referencing, however. Gary Kelly claims that in the early 1790s all sides of the debate about constitutional reform published material from the Civil War period to suit their polemical purposes; for example, the Society for Constitutional Information printed extracts from seventeenth-century republican writers in support of the rights of man, while anti-Revolutionaries cited Tory writers of the period to point to the evils of civil war and levelling.<sup>337</sup> By 1793, according to Kelly, comparisons between the parties, doctrines and personalities of the Civil War and those of the 1790s had become 'commonplace', a normal part of political discourse.<sup>338</sup>

In 1793, the execution of Louis XVI strengthened the political link to the regicide of the Civil War, the fate of both Louis and Charles I forming a powerful and

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<sup>334</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 15.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Burke refers to Peters praising the Saints who would 'execute judgements on the heathen, and punishments on the people' and who would 'bind their *kings* with chains and their *nobles* with fetters of iron'.

<sup>336</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 67.

<sup>337</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), p. 204. For a detailed examination of the continuing influence of the Civil War on constitutional discussion throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil War and the Passions of Posterity* (London: Penguin, 2001). See, also, Joseph Nicholes, 'Revolutions Compared. The English Civil War as a Political Touchstone in Romantic Literature', in *Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric*, ed. by Keith Hanley and Raman Selden (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 261-75.

<sup>338</sup> Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 3.

emotive backdrop to the Treason Trials and the Gagging Acts. Louis identified himself with Charles I; according to Kelly, he read about him avidly in Hume's *History* during his imprisonment and even on the night before his execution.<sup>339</sup> John Barrell suggests that the timing of Louis' death was important, since it occurred only five days before the anniversary of the death of Charles I, commemorated in Anglican churches as the death of 'Charles the Martyr'. This meant that few of the sermons preached on that day in 1793 'would fail to compare the work of the English regicides with that of the French'.<sup>340</sup> Barrell explores this complex discourse, showing its relationship to the government attempts in the 1794 Treason Trials to prove treason on the grounds of 'imagining' the death of the king, that is to say of King George III; treason was held to occur 'when a man doth compass or imagine the death of our lord the king'.<sup>341</sup> Central to the court proceedings were semantic arguments over whether 'imagine' should be restricted to its older meaning of 'intend' or its more modern meaning of 'envisage', arguments which were resolved in favour of the defence. However, anyone attempting after these court cases to 'envisage' the killing of a king by his subjects and to speak or write about it would have been foolhardy to say the least.

That the referencing of the Civil War was not confined to overtly polemical writing, but appeared in fiction, and was part of the same discourse, is proved by its use in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794). Both Gary Kelly and Peter Marshall have examined the ways in which Godwin used this historical parallel. Marshall maintains that 'much of the debate on the French Revolution was seen in terms of the old struggle between the Royalists and the Republicans', and that Godwin 'always had the struggle close to mind'. Both Marshall and Kelly point out that Godwin uses the name Falkland for Caleb's employer and persecutor, linking the character to Lucius Cary, the second

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>340</sup> Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death*, p. 75.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

Viscount Falkland, thus identifying him with hierarchical power and ancient codes of honour.<sup>342</sup>

*Marchmont* makes the connection between the present and the past more obliquely than does Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. There is no suggestion that any character from the novel can be directly identified with an historical person in the manner of Godwin's Falkland. On the contrary, Smith uses some historical names which markedly do not match the political proclivities of her characters. For example, the historical Marchmonts were anything but royalist and Jacobite loyalists. The first earl of Marchmont (1641-1724) was allegedly involved in the Rye House Plot (1683), which aimed at the assassination of Charles II and his brother and heir James, Duke of York. The earl of Marchmont evaded capture and fled to the Continent, only returning in 1688 as a member of the forces which brought William of Orange to power. Equally, Althea's father is inappropriately given the name Dacres, which has royalist associations; Sir Thomas Dacres fought on the royalist side during the Civil War. Further evidence that Smith is deliberately making these reversed connections is the fact that the earl of Marchmont's evasion of capture was initially accomplished by hiding in his own house and being given food secretly, just as the fictional Armyn Marchmont does when he is hiding from Vampyre. The loyalty of the historical Dacres family to the crown resulted in the forfeit of lands and debt which oppressed the future generations of the family; they suffered the same fate as the fictional Marchmont family.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, pp. 2002-8; Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 149-50. For further examination of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century fictional employment of the English Civil Wars, including that by Godwin, see Nicola J. Watson, 'Domestic Revolutions: Fictions of National History, 1788-1830', *Wordsworth Circle*, 25 (1994), 129-34.

<sup>343</sup> John R. Young, 'Hume, Patrick, first earl of Marchmont (1641-1724)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, May 2006 < <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14150> > [accessed 2 May 2011]; Henry Summerson, 'Dacre family (per. 1542-1716)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, January 2008 < <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71861> > [accessed 2 May 2011]. For other suggestions concerning Smith's choice of historical names and places in *Marchmont*, see Davies and Guest's editorial introduction, pp. xvii-xviii.

In naming the fictional Mohun, Smith turns to a figure from a later period of royalist history, the fourth Baron Mohun (1675?-1712).<sup>344</sup> The fourth Baron Mohun was a rake who was killed in a famous duel with the Duke of Hamilton. Jonathan Swift believed that this duel was instigated by the Whigs to bring about the death of a man of Tory or even possibly Jacobite sympathies, a detail which links the historical Mohun to his fictional counterpart's pursuit of a scion of the Jacobite Marchmont family. However, the historical Mohun was an aristocrat fighting for the ownership of his estate (against the Duke of Hamilton), a reversal of the situation in the novel, where the non-aristocratic Mohun conspires to acquire Marchmont property.<sup>345</sup>

By mismatching names in this fashion, Smith prevents the interpretation of the novel's Civil War references in a directly allegorical fashion, whilst still providing many reminders of the connections between that period and the mid-1790s. The deliberate avoidance of direct parallels, but the inclusion of reminders of the issues which were central to the Civil War and its aftermath, means that the narrative acts not as a vehicle for a reworking of old battles, but as an indirect reminder of the new ones. Issues of the relationship between the governed and their governors, between monarchs and subjects, at the heart of the Civil War conflicts, were still relevant to contemporary society and had helped lead to the political oppression against which Smith protests.

Smith's most overt use of Civil War history is, however, a sophisticated juxtaposition of different interpretations of historical events in the accounts which Althea hears and reads during her stay at Eastwoodleigh. The accounts are provided in three contrasted contexts and present contrasted political views. The first is the pro-royalist version of the history of the house and its inhabitants' involvement in the Civil War and the Jacobite rebellions. This is related by the old housekeeper, Mrs Mosley as

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<sup>344</sup> Davies and Guest suggest a parallel with the first Baron Mohun, which seems much less likely than one with the fourth Baron, a more famous namesake.

<sup>345</sup> For details of the fourth Baron Mohun, see V.G. Kiernan, 'Mohun, Charles, fourth Baron Mohun (1675?-1712)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, October 2005 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18881>> [accessed on 5 May 2011].

she conducts Althea on a tour of the house. The second is an overview of the history of the English monarchy, obtained from Althea's reading during her stay there, and which depicts the monarchy in a less than favourable light. The third is a family memoir kept first by the grandfather, and then by the father of Armyn Marchmont, which relates the sufferings of individual family members arising from their royalist allegiances. Thus sympathy for the flamboyant courage of Marchmont's Cavalier ancestors and the price they paid for their convictions is contrasted with a less flattering account of the role of the monarchy in English history.

For Mrs Mosley, the Marchmont family is 'a most worthy and brave race of gentlemen', who had gained no title despite the lives and money they had sacrificed to the 'King's service' and whose fall had culminated in the distress of the accomplished and virtuous Marchmont (p. 94). As she walks with Althea through the semi-derelict house, Mrs Mosely relates their history.

Althea now found herself in an immense hall -- 'Here', said her conductress, 'at these long tables, which though of oak are now so much decayed, were daily assembled, during the Great Rebellion [Civil War], above three hundred armed men; they were disciplined, clothed and fed by Sir Armyn Marchmont, who was knighted in the field by King Charles the First; and from hence were led the fifty horse, who just before the battle of Braddock Down went out against a party of Cromwell's army that approached the house; and the brave Edward Marchmont, the second son of the family, fell in his father's park. His mother, who doted upon him, died broken-hearted a few months afterwards; and from that time they say Sir Armyn never seemed to enjoy life, though he lingered on for three or four years, and continued to the last to defend this place, and keep it as a garrison for the King. (p. 97)

Mrs Mosley's emotional account continues at some length and voices strongly the sympathy and admiration which might be felt for those who supported the royalist cause with loyalty and bravery. There is also a sense of the allure of the cause, even if ultimately it might not deserve such allegiance nor be espoused by the protagonists or author. As the tour draws to a close, Smith links the young Armyn Marchmont's

relationship with his father to arguments in favour of obedience to monarchical authority. Marchmont had attended his father in the period leading to his death, a fact which prompts Althea to reflect that:

The place seemed sanctified by the fortitude and filial piety of its former inhabitant; and not deterred by the dust and cobwebs with which they were covered, she stooped and took up one of the five or six torn and mouldy books that lay in a corner. One was a Greek testament, which from the date and name had evidently served Marchmont at school. Another was part of a dictionary that appeared also to have been of that juvenile party. [...] The rest were only old acts of parliament, and a few leaves of the *Eikon Basilike*. Althea felt an irresistible urge to possess herself of these books. (p.102)

The reference to the *Eikon Basilike* is particularly resonant. It was published in 1649 on the day of Charles I's burial and was said to be his final meditations, although it was probably written by his chaplain, John Gauden. It formed an important part of the discourse of 'Charles the Martyr'. Here Smith brings together images of filial devotion and paternal desecration which, as in *The Banished Man*, are interwoven with images of the deaths of kings.

As in *The Banished Man*, Smith shows the emotional power of the royalist political stance and reminds the reader of arguments which were part of a wider political discourse connecting the microcosm of the family to the macrocosm of the monarchical state. In both novels, however, this is part of a debate. Just as in *The Banished Man*, Smith attempts to present views which counteract the emotionally charged royalist arguments, so it is in the case of *Marchmont*.

The counter-balance comes firstly when, also during her stay at Eastwoodleigh, Althea's own reading gives an overview of English history. What she reads not only helps counteract the allure of the Marchmonts' royalist position, but also presents a more general castigation of monarchy as an institution through an unedifying accumulation of its shortcomings:



Uncertain accounts, mingled and debased with monkish legends, accounts of beings who, with almost the single exception of Alfred, were so far from being fit to reign, that they were not fit to live, could not long detain her; nor was her imagination much cheered by the rude attempts at polishing the half savage Anglo-Saxon by the fierce Norman invader. In following their line through, and those of Plantagenet and Tudor, there is but little to soothe the mind. Ambition, the vice of great minds, is so degraded by ferocity, religion so perverted by superstition, the father is so often armed against the son, the child against the parent, the brothers against each other [...] that the reader rejoices to bring his observations down to later times, and hopes that when the period in which what is called the *art* of government becomes better understood, order, and of course happiness, might be its effects. But from the *glorious* Queen Elizabeth, she who is pronounced by Lord Bacon to be '*admirable among women, and memorable among princes*', to the wretched and degraded pensioner of Louis the Fourteenth (Charles the Second), there is scarcely an interval that can be read with pleasure by one who, instead of having formed ideas from the little abridged histories so early put into the hands of children, dares to think for himself. (p.120)

The memoir which Althea subsequently reads is supplemented by Mrs Mosley's narrative and gives a detailed picture of the personal involvement of Marchmont family members in royalist history (p. 123). It covers a period which moves beyond the Civil War proper, but its accounts of the family's sufferings as a result of their continuing support of the Stuart cause, including during the periods of the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, which attempted to restore the Stuart line, are an additional redress to the emotional pull of the Marchmonts' honour and bravery. The memoir begins with the Civil War period, when the first Sir Armyn Marchmont gave his support to King Charles I:

In the course of those sad years which deluged the kingdom with blood, the second of his three sons and his only brother fell in the field. He did not survive them long. [...] But when the son of the deceased monarch made his last effort at Worcester, Mr. Marchmont (for, his father being only a knight, he had not title) attended him thither with a small but chosen party of followers. After the event of that day, he returned, slightly wounded, towards home, and was for some time concealed in his own house. When it became safe to reappear, he resumed, with some

precaution, his former way of living; but by the sad condition to which his friends were reduced, as well as the restraint he was himself compelled to live under, his spirits and health became so much affected, that he gradually sunk into the grave. (pp. 122-3)

The description of the continuing royalist support of subsequent generations explains how the family fortunes were gradually sacrificed. Smith is able to bring a critical authorial edge to counteract the admiration for individual bravery and loyalty which the memoir also elicits. For example, there is the implication that both family and would-be monarchs and their supporters are in error when the memoir tells of the next heir, who is in a quandary because he is 'unable to deny or defend the misconduct of James', but continues to detest 'from the influence of hereditary prejudice what he deemed the usurpation of William'. Unable to resolve the difficulty, he withdraws entirely from public life, leaving his brother to follow 'the fortunes of the misguided monarch' (p. 123). The memoir continues with the fate of Armyn Marchmont's grandfather whose fortune is further dissipated because of his support for the Stuart cause. The narrative then moves into the next generation:

The father of young Marchmont saw himself, towards the middle of his life, surrounded by a family of three daughters and a son, with only a nominal fortune -- for his estates were mortgaged for almost as much as they were worth. [...] The last Marchmont lived only to see the inevitable destruction of his house -- to see the son he loved likely to become a destitute wanderer, and his wife and daughters destined to indigence. -- His heart was broken, and his eyes closed on this cruel prospect. (p. 123)

The inclusion of these contrasted historical narratives demonstrates Smith's acknowledgement of the complexity of the political issues and is suggestive also of internal authorial debate, like the forbidden polemical discourse of which it is a shadow. It is appropriate, in an attempt to balance and consider what might be termed the evidence in a debate about these issues, that this attempt is undertaken by Althea, whose

name, as Judith Davis Miller notes, ‘is reminiscent of the Greek word for “truth”’.<sup>346</sup> Althea ‘dares to think’ for herself about the nature of monarchy, the duties owed to it and by it and the degree to which thinking for oneself should be repressed.<sup>347</sup> Smith offers the reader an invitation to consider and reflect upon the forbidden topics of the moment, at one remove from the dangers of prosecution:

That there were men who adhered from principle, and still more from personal affection, to Charles the First, misled and obstinate as he was, she could easily conceive; but it was more difficult to account for the infatuation of those who sacrificed their families and their country to the degraded *pensioner* of *France*, and the unfeeling employer of *Jeffries*. Still, there is something so respectable in the enthusiasm of even mistaken fidelity, something so impressive in the disinterested generosity of sacrificing everything for an exiled and ruined family, that the ancestors of Marchmont became more than before the objects of her veneration; and their unfortunate descendant, of her pity. (p. 124)

There is nothing remarkable in the critical designation of Charles II as the ‘pensioner’ of France, since it was generally considered that he bound himself by treaty to Louis XIV’s France. What is important, however, is the attention drawn to the employment of Judge Jeffreys, who served under both Charles II and James II. Jeffreys tried Algernon Sidney in 1683, although his greatest claim to notoriety was his presiding with infamous brutality over hundreds of trials for treason after Monmouth’s rebellion in 1685. Thus, while in one way Smith appears simply to be denigrating two Stuart monarchs, she is also, obliquely, reminding the reader of the Treason Trials of the 1790s.

The connection between the Treason Trials and the trials conducted by Judge Jeffreys -- particularly that of Algernon Sidney -- is an important one, although the references are slipped unobtrusively into the narrative. A direct reference to Sidney comes towards the end of the novel, when Desborough arrives to organise Marchmont’s release from prison and an end to all the financial problems of the young couple.

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<sup>346</sup> Miller, ‘The Politics of Truth and Deception’ p. 352.

<sup>347</sup> See *Marchmont*, p. 120, quoted above, p. 183.

Desborough, who had married the sister of Marchmont's father against the wishes of her family, had disagreed with the latter in matters of politics. He explains that:

He was what I called a tory, and he called me...not a whig, but a republican. I did not much quarrel with him for ranking me with such names as Sidney and Hampden, but I hated to see him, poor man! ruining himself for his principles, as he called them, which nobody cared about or thanked him for. (p. 408)

Desborough's understated admiration of Sidney and Hampden, although apparently made in passing, is significant. Sidney is one of those men listed by Price in his *Discourse* for disseminating to others just notions of 'their rights of religion and the nature and end of civil government'.<sup>348</sup> According to Joseph Nicholes, Sidney was seen as 'the venerated martyr to the cause of constitutional liberties, whose *Discourses Concerning Government* became a chapbook for revolutionary politics at the end of the eighteenth century'.<sup>349</sup> Of even greater significance in the context of *Marchmont*, however, are the implicit but obvious parallels between Hampden and Sidney and those tried for treason in the 1790s. Both men were at the receiving end of attempts by the Crown to silence them on the grounds of treason as were the defendants in the Treason Trials of the 1790s. John Hampden was impeached for high treason by Charles I in 1642 and although his was only an attempted arrest it was a key moment in the conflict between Crown and Parliament. Algernon Sidney had fought on the parliamentary side in the Civil War but had opposed the execution of Charles I. He was, however, arrested on suspicion of involvement in the Rye House plot and was brought to a trial presided over by Judge Jeffreys. Sidney's writings were produced in court to prove his culpability under Jeffreys' ruling that 'scribere est agere' (to write is to act), the manuscript of his *Discourses Concerning Government* (eventually published in 1698),

<sup>348</sup> Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, p. 13.

<sup>349</sup> Joseph Nicholes, 'Revolutions Compared', p. 263.

cited as evidence that he believed in the right to revolution.<sup>350</sup> At his execution in 1683, Sidney delivered a ‘paper to the sheriffs’, which declared that ‘we live in an age that makes truth pass for treason’, a comment that might have been equally well applied to the government suppression of the 1790s.<sup>351</sup>

Indeed, polemicists of the 1790s who were prosecuted often identified themselves, not surprisingly, with Sidney. For example, Tom Paine in his *Letter Addressed to the Addressers* (1792), responding to his prosecution for seditious libel, refers to the terms ‘libellous and seditious’ and claims, ‘these terms were made part of the charge brought against Locke, Hampden, and Sydney, and will continue to be brought against all good men, so long as bad government shall continue’.<sup>352</sup> An even closer identification between the past and present is seen in a transcript of Joseph Gerrald’s trial in Edinburgh in 1794. This publication prints passages from his trial and that of Sidney in parallel columns, selecting nearly identical words, phrases and sentiments from each, history repeating itself in a sinister and disturbing fashion. This particular transcript of Gerrald’s trial is ‘corrected by himself’, thus suggesting his approval of, or his origination of the idea that his treatment at the hands of the servants of the Crown had so much in common with that of Sidney that the one was a repetition of the other.<sup>353</sup> Godwin visited Gerrald in prison and wrote a letter to him advising him

<sup>350</sup> See Jonathan Scott, ‘Sidney, Algernon (1623-1683)’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, January 2008 < <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25519> > [accessed 5 May 2011].

<sup>351</sup> Algernon Sidney, *Paper to the Sheriffs*, in *The Works of Algernon Sydney: A New Edition*, ed. by J. Robertson (London: T. Becket & Co. et alia, 1772), p. 37.

<sup>352</sup> Tom Paine, *Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation* (1792), in *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, ed. by Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, World’s Classics Series, 1998), p. 354.

<sup>353</sup> Joseph Gerrald, *The Defence of Joseph Gerrald on a Charge of Sedition, before the High Court of Justiciary, at Edinburgh. To which are added Parallel Passages between the Speeches of Lord Chief Justice Jeffries, in the Case of Algernon Sydney, and of the Lord Chief Justice Clerk, on the Trial of Joseph Gerrald. Corrected by Himself* (London: J. Ridgeway, 1794), title page, pp. 51-2. For further evidence of radicals’ self-identification with Sidney, see also Blair Worden, ‘The Commonwealth Kidney of Algernon Sidney’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 24 (1985), p. 33.

as to the best way to conduct himself at his trial. However, he was found guilty of sedition and transported to New South Wales where he died five months later.<sup>354</sup>

The political content of the novel dominates the narrative. Although it retains some elements of the courtship novel, since it does unite Marchmont and Althea in marriage and ultimately place them, together with deserving friends, in a comfortable domestic setting, *Marchmont* has moved far from the courtship model within which Smith worked at the beginning of her novelistic career.

Smith's use of marriage as a plot resolution had already shifted its status by the time she wrote *The Old Manor House*, when it no longer serves as the closure of the narrative; and in *Montalbert*, marriage comes early in the novel and is itself the subject of a radical critique. In *Marchmont*, the marriage of the worthy protagonists is even less important as a form of closure, occurring long before the resolution and including a stay in the Kings Bench prison; the story of marriage is thus subsumed within the critique of law and social injustice.

Similarly, the role of the landed estate as a reward for good behaviour has changed. Whereas, even in *The Old Manor House*, a contested house and estate eventually passed to a worthy owner, in *Marchmont*, Smith rejects this conventional resolution. At the end of the novel, Marchmont does regain a great deal of the estate, including the house at Eastwoodleigh, but tellingly, he and Althea choose not to live there. In symbolic rejection of the mistakes of the past they choose instead to live in the house Althea inherits from her aunt (p. 416).

As in *The Banished Man*, the patriarchal family is given particular prominence, the emotional pull of unquestioning loyalty to fathers counterbalanced by images of its potentially destructive implications. The persistent reminders in *Marchmont* of Civil War history, which focus upon these implications, are political in their effect and show

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<sup>354</sup> See Godwin's letter to Joseph Gerrald, repr. in *Caleb Williams*, ed. Hindle, pp. 354-8.

that Smith continued to play a part in radical political discourse despite the intended silence imposed by the Pitt government. This involvement was to become more overt and more closely informed by radical polemic, reaching its zenith in her final completed novel, *The Young Philosopher* (1798).

## Chapter Eight

### Godwinian Arguments for Freedom of Expression: *The Young Philosopher* (1798)

Written two years later than *Marchmont*, *The Young Philosopher* (1798) extends its criticisms of government restrictions on freedom of speech and expression, freedom to voice support for the reform of a society against whose injustice and corruption Smith has never ceased to protest.<sup>355</sup> In common with many other radicals, Smith had long perceived that the French Revolution had betrayed its ideals. However, this did not mean that she had abandoned the view that the status quo in England was in need of drastic change and, equally importantly, she opposed government attempts to silence support for such change.<sup>356</sup> *The Young Philosopher*, as is the case in Smith's earlier novels, depicts an oppressive society underpinned by a corrupt legal system and the unjust concentration of excessive power in wealth and rank. As in *Marchmont*, Smith's criticism of society is implied through a narrative of the sufferings of the virtuous, coupled with an attack on government measures against the expression of ideas which favoured change and reform. In *The Young Philosopher*, the protest is more overt than in *Marchmont*, and is closely in dialogue with the work of William Godwin.

By now, Smith had become personally acquainted with Godwin. The discovery of four letters from Smith to Godwin and one to his second wife, dated between 1797 and 1800, is evidence of the nature and scope of this relationship.<sup>357</sup> Smith's particular

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<sup>355</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Young Philosopher* (1798), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 10, ed. by A.A. Markley. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and made in parentheses in the text.

<sup>356</sup> For evidence of desire for reform on the part of middle class radicals continuing well into 1797, see Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, p. 221.

<sup>357</sup> Pamela Clemit, 'Charlotte Smith to William and Mary Jane Godwin: Five Holograph Letters', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 55 (2006), 29-40.



interest in Godwin's polemical work during this period is indicated in her letter dated 1 September 1797 in which she tells Godwin that she is now reading his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*.<sup>358</sup> Godwin's diary also shows that Smith was a personal acquaintance by 2 May 1797, when he notes that she dined at his home.<sup>359</sup> This new acquaintanceship coincided with much of the writing of *The Young Philosopher*, for although in May 1796, Smith had already recorded her intentions to write 'a work of a quite different nature from any I have yet undertaken', she mostly composed the novel rather later. It is likely that this is the work to which she refers in June 1797 when she confesses that she has completed only 'about one hundred pages' because of despair at the lack of 'books and leisure' she would need to complete it. She reports that she 'meant to have called it "The Young Philosopher"' and claims that some of her ideas, both of character and incident, were 'more likely to be work'd up into a composition of some novelty & of more solidity than the usual croud of Novels'. By October 1797, she had 'finished the first volume' and negotiated a deal with the publishers; the novel was finally published in June 1798.<sup>360</sup> Twenty meetings between Smith and Godwin are recorded in his diary between May 1797 and June 1798, and he continued to record their friendship until 12 September 1805. Of the total of eighty recorded meetings between the two, forty-seven are one-to-one conversations and thirty-three involve other acquaintances, often well-known individuals of radical persuasion such as Elizabeth Inchbald, Thomas Holcroft, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Horne Tooke, as well as Mary Wollstonecraft, whose love affair with Godwin had started in August 1796. Thus Smith wrote her last complete novel during a period when she was in political conversation with Godwin and his circle.

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>359</sup> Godwin, *William Godwin's Diary* < <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk> > [accessed 6 February 2011].

<sup>360</sup> Letter of 10 May 1796 to Thomas Cadell, Jr. and William Davies; letter of 22 June 1797 to Thomas Cadell, Jr. and William Davies; letter of 8 October 1797 to Thomas Cadell, Jr. and William Davies in Smith, *Collected Letters*, pp. 233-4, 278, 291.

The connections between *The Young Philosopher* and both Godwin's person and his general philosophical and political beliefs, particularly as they are articulated in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, have been noted by a number of modern critics, including Loraine Fletcher, Amy Garnai, Chris Jones, A.A. Markley and Judith Davis Miller.<sup>361</sup> However, this novel is involved with contemporary political discourse in a much closer, more specific and more dynamic way than has hitherto been realised or documented. Smith uses *The Young Philosopher* to engage with Godwin's pamphlet protest against the Gagging Acts, *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices and Unlawful Assemblies* (1795), as well as with the furore in Parliament which extended into the wider community. Godwin's pamphlet was, as Mark Philp argues, part of his ongoing battle with government over where the line should be drawn between 'the seditious and the philosophical'.<sup>362</sup> Godwin distinguishes in this pamphlet between 'agitators' and 'philosophers', claiming that whilst the former might damage the fabric of society, the latter, in which category he includes himself, offer no threat. Both Smith's novel and Godwin's polemical text address the political issue which arose from the imposition of the restrictions on free expression of ideas: that is, whether the articulation of views which were unorthodox or against government policy were dangerous to the stability of the state, and should therefore rightly be treated as treasonous.<sup>363</sup>

Smith's technique in *The Young Philosopher* for depicting a society in need of reform and for criticising government attempts to silence reformists is that which she adopts in *Desmond*. She combines a narrative focused on the suffering of virtuous, mostly female, characters in an oppressive and unjust society with the articulation and representation of polemical/philosophical debate through the male protagonists. As in

<sup>361</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, pp. 279-80; Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s*, p. 59; Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, pp. 177-83; Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, ed. by A.A. Markley, p. ix; Miller, 'The Politics of Truth and Deception', *passim*.

<sup>362</sup> Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, p. 103.

<sup>363</sup> Godwin, *Considerations*, p. 140.

*Desmond*, although for additional reasons, Smith attempts to distance herself from the views of these protagonists. In later novels, Smith had to steer a fine line between the need to sell her work in a time of increasing anti-radical sympathies among the general population, the threat of government oppression, and her wish to promote a pro-radical viewpoint. Occupying this uneasy position, using the fictionality of the genre as a loophole, she writes in the Preface: 'There may be many traits, many ideas and even many prejudices, which may be necessary to support or render these characters natural, that are by no means those of the composer of the book' (p. 4).

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Despite Smith's protestations, in the story of Laura and her daughter Medora she represents British society in ways which validated, by implication, the demands for reform which radical thinkers, speakers and writers made in the real world. A complex two-generational tale includes a framing narrative, set in the 1790s, focusing on George Delmont, the 'young philosopher' of the title. The framing narrative tells of his courtship of and marriage to Medora, who, accompanied by her mother, Laura, has come to England to pursue her rightful claim to a share of her deceased maternal grandfather's estate; a task which is finally accomplished after a series of dangerous adventures on the part of both women, who are at the mercy of England's corrupt legal system. There is also an inset narrative in which Laura tells Delmont the story of her elopement with and marriage to Glenmorris, the birth of their daughter Medora and their eventual relocation to America.

In both the framing and the inset narrative, suffering is presented in terms of pursuit, sexual menace, concealment and imprisonment. These are tropes which characterise Smith's novelistic reworking of political concerns in other novels; the

world of Medora and Laura in *The Young Philosopher* is also that of Althea in *Marchmont* and Rosalie in *Montalbert*. The inexorable nature of oppression is emphasised by the double narrative, a repetition of suffering through two generations, the tale of Laura used to 'double' that of her daughter Medora. This is a technique Smith had used in earlier novels such as *Montalbert*, and it traps the characters in a recurrent nightmare of physical and mental suffering from which the law offers no protection.

The suffering of both women is enacted within a plethora of Gothic-type scenarios. For example, for Laura, in the inset narrative, there is a dangerous moonlight elopement from her home at Sandthwaite Castle in Lancashire with her lover, Glenmorris, a dashing but impoverished Scottish laird. The young couple take refuge in Scotland, whence Glenmorris is abducted by privateers, ultimately arriving in America. The pregnant Laura is left at the mercy of his only Scottish relative, the grotesquely cruel Ladie Kilbrodie, a bigoted Jacobite who lives in one end of a ruined monastery. Because of ill-treatment, Laura gives birth prematurely and the baby survives only three days. Ladie Kilbrodie tells Laura that her un-baptised baby son cannot be buried in the consecrated ground of the old monastery so Laura secretly, and in extreme anguish, buries the corpse in the ruins of the building. After an unsuccessful attempt to escape, Laura is returned to her imprisonment at Kilbrodie and is not rescued until Glenmorris manages to return from America.

In the framing narrative, Laura and Medora are penniless when the former is unable to draw cash against the bills Glenmorris has provided for them to use in England. Laura tries unsuccessfully to find help, and reaches a state of despair and physical distress which culminates in her collapse and incarceration in a private lunatic asylum. Despite her eventual escape and reunion with both Medora and Glenmorris, her health is broken, and indeed she is described in the final chapter as Glenmorris's 'dying

Laura' (p. 428). In parallel to Laura's sufferings, but also in the framing narrative, Medora is abducted by a mercenary lawyer, Darnell, who tries to force her to accept his advances and marry him. More Anna St. Ives than Clarissa, despite the child-of-nature innocence with which she is earlier credited, Medora resists him and makes good her escape, only to fall into the clutches of a voluptuary, Sir Harry Richmond. Her escape from the fate of other young women who have been abducted to the sexual lair of his country estate is engineered by another female, Sir Harry's daughter. The plot is manipulated to ensure that the physical survival and sexual integrity of the female protagonists is mainly due to their own resourcefulness and resilience or to the intervention of other women, an authorial decision which is a further development of Smith's feminist discourse.

Meanwhile, the male protagonists, Glenmorris, George Delmont and their friend Armitage, variously the relatives and friends of the victimised women, are not assigned the conventional roles of protectors or rescuers, although all three are involved in unsuccessful attempts to rescue both Laura and Medora. Glenmorris, it is true, does play some part in the depiction of legal corruption, since he spends time in debtors' prison, but for the most part his role is as a member of this triumvirate of male 'philosophers'. Their function is instead to engage directly with the political arguments which were presented both for and against the treatment of radical thinkers in the political discourse of the time.

The title of the novel links it directly to this political discourse. Angela Keane notes that in Rousseau's novel, *Julie: ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) the phrase 'young philosopher' was used by Claire to describe Saint-Preux, and suggests that Delmont's upbringing according to 'the tenets of Rousseau' therefore earns him this title.<sup>364</sup> More generally, the term 'philosopher' had recent historical links to the *philosophes* and their

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<sup>364</sup> Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation*, p. 103.

iconoclastic writings; depending on one's viewpoint, the spreading of their ideas through published material had been a force for necessary change or an agent of catastrophe. A connection between ideas, the expression of ideas and their effect on the stability of society was established in political discourse, and the extent to which the dissemination of ideas through reading and writing should be controlled was a major issue of the late 1790s, fought over by reformists and loyalists, politicians and writers.

However, the expression 'philosopher' has a more specific association with those radicals who were often designated 'New Philosophers', both by themselves, and, in derogatory tone, by their adversaries. Such individuals were members of what Philp terms a 'literate and critical intellectual culture', made up of groups in both London and the provinces, which met for discussions in which they were able to voice their 'often very radical views on social, political and religious issues'. Godwin was at the heart of this discourse, his 'circle' consisting of a very wide range and number of 'professional and semi-professional men and women'. For such groups, who, according to Philp 'sustained a commitment to radical thinking throughout most of the last decade of the century', debate and discussion was a central activity.<sup>365</sup>

Moreover, the label of 'philosopher' was familiar even to readers who were outside the ranks of what might be termed the politically active and it is clear that the debate in society at large about the dangers or benefits of reading and writing 'philosophy' continued after the imposition of the Gagging Acts. A well-known example of this wider debate is the novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), in which Elizabeth Hamilton satirises Godwin and others, using the term 'philosopher' to suggest misguided adherence to a set of ideas which can threaten the stability of society. Hamilton makes substantial use of the actual words of Godwin's writing, which must have been known, either directly or through reported and shortened versions of the

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<sup>365</sup> Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, pp.125-7.

originals, by many readers of the period.<sup>366</sup> Smith is also a target of the novel's satire since Captain Delmond in Hamilton's novel is a near namesake of Smith's hero Delmont. Delmond's unwise reading includes 'the works of many free-thinking philosophers, whose labours alarmed the pious zeal of our fathers, but whose names are now forgotten'.<sup>367</sup>

These particular connotations of 'philosophy' and Godwin's identification with it are central to *The Young Philosopher*. Some modern criticism has focused upon the male 'philosophers' of this novel, noting some of the ways in which they represent Godwin's person and general beliefs.<sup>368</sup> This chapter enlarges and extends this analysis, demonstrating further the connections which can be made between Smith's novel and what might be termed the general tenets of Godwin's political vision. My examination of the influence of Godwin will consider firstly the parallels between the attitudes of the three male 'philosophers' and Godwin's beliefs as they are expressed in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. My examination endorses the general agreement among a number of critics that Godwin's beliefs influence Smith, but it brings far more in the way of specific textual reference to identify the ways in which she draws upon this polemical text. It will also show in detail how Smith engages with Godwin's direct attack on government policy in his *Considerations*.

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Smith identifies George Delmont as 'THE YOUNG PHILOSOPHER' in the final sentence of the novel, but it is clear that all three of her male protagonists are, to some degree 'philosophers' who have much in common with Godwin (p. 433). Critics vary in

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<sup>366</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), ed. by Claire Grogan (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000). For details of Hamilton's use of excerpts from and references to Godwin's writing, see Grogan's textual footnotes.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>368</sup> See, for example, critics cited above, p. 192, footnote 361.

their conclusions as to the nature and extent of the similarity between Godwin and his fictional offshoots. For example, Jones claims that Armitage is the 'Godwinian philosopher of the novel' but that some features of Delmont's character are also linked to Godwin's philosophy, in ways which qualify his 'Rousseauistic sensibility'.<sup>369</sup> Fletcher remarks that 'Armitage is clearly based on Godwin' and Miller that Armitage 'evokes the figure of Godwin'.<sup>370</sup> Markley states that Smith is 'deliberately absorbing and reinterpreting the philosophies' of Godwin and Wollstonecraft and that 'aspects of Godwin's personality and political philosophy are thinly veiled' in the characters of Armitage and Glenmorris (p. vii). Markley also notes that Smith heads her second chapter, in which she describes the upbringing of George Delmont, with a quotation from a section of *Political Justice* (p. ix). The section in question considers the importance of education and environment in the formation of character and it is likely that Smith is using Godwin's theory to explain the way in which George develops into a thinking and compassionate human being.

Critics have also gone further along the route of applying Godwin's theories to the workings of plot and character, as if the entire novel, in some way, demonstrates Godwinism in action. Jones, for example, tries to make the case that 'the major parallel structure of the book also owes something to Godwin [...] the extent to which one can or should divest oneself of the natural and habitual ties that, perhaps irrationally, bind one to society as it is and inhibit efforts towards self-education and the reform of society'.<sup>371</sup> Miller suggests that, 'As she progresses from *Delmont* (1792) [*sic*], through *The Young Philosopher* (1798), Smith's concerns parallel those of Godwin, effectively testing the applicability of his abstractions on individual lives'. In *The Young Philosopher*, Miller claims, characters 'wrestle with the issue of the difficulty of

<sup>369</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, pp. 177, 180.

<sup>370</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 279; Miller, 'The Politics of Truth and Deception', p. 356.

<sup>371</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, pp. 177-8.



establishing truth as the basis for both personal and public life in a society that is filled with deception and disguise'.<sup>372</sup> Garnai, in her recent examination of the influence of Godwin on Smith, Inchbald and Robinson, also foregrounds *Political Justice*, looking at 'their engagement with the notion of truth'.<sup>373</sup>

It is not difficult to justify the claim that Armitage is a partial fictionalisation of Godwin, using, as a basis for this claim, some knowledge of Godwin's reputation and *Political Justice*. For example, like Godwin, Armitage is described as an 'author', with a reputation as a 'free-thinker', who had written a 'cutting and argumentative book' against Burke. Armitage is known for his 'benevolence to all the world', a clear link to Godwin, who devoted a chapter of *Political Justice* to the necessity for benevolence, claiming that, 'Benevolent intention is essential to virtue' (p. 66).<sup>374</sup> Armitage is also said to display 'humanity to the poor', a virtue which connects him further to Godwin, who, for example, demonstrates impassioned concern for the plight of the poor in a section of *Political Justice*. In this section, as part of his attack on the social injustice which causes such suffering, Godwin describes the peasant and the labourer returning after their toil to 'a family, famished with hunger, exposed half naked to the inclemencies of the sky' (p. 63).<sup>375</sup>

Later in the novel, Smith places Armitage on the receiving end of the type of accusations which were levelled at Godwin by traditionalists, particularly during the latter part of the 1790s. An ultra-Burkean, Mrs Crewkerne, accuses him of being 'an atheist, a deist, a freethinker [...] a jacobin, and a republican' (p. 302). These accusations are similar to the attacks made on Godwin by anti-Jacobin pamphleteers, who, according to Isaac Kramnick, singled him out 'with particular malice'.<sup>376</sup>

<sup>372</sup> Miller, 'The Politics of Truth and Deception', p. 338.

<sup>373</sup> Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>374</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1798), ed. by Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1976), Book IV, Chapter X, p. 385. References in this chapter are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, Book VIII, Chapter III, p. 730.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Armitage answers Mrs Crewkerne's attacks at length, usually, but not always, in agreement with Godwin's philosophy. An example of Armitage's general alignment with Godwin is his definition of himself as a freethinker:

If you mean by a freethinker, that I venture to think on every topic of human enquiry, and most on those which seem most to involve the happiness or misery of my species, I must plead guilty to the charge. (p. 304)

He also takes issue with the accusation that he is a Jacobin:

I only have to say, that if you mean, among other heavy misdemeanours included under it, that I either approve, or ever did approve of the violence, cruelty and perfidy, with which the French have polluted the cause of freedom, you are greatly mistaken. (p. 306)

This point of view is in line with that which is strongly stated in *Political Justice*, Godwin drawing attention to it in the prefaces to both the first and the second editions (1793, 1796). In the first edition he states that one of the express purposes of the book is that of 'dissuading from tumult and violence' and in the second writes, 'No man can more fervently deprecate scenes of commotion and tumult than the author of this book'.<sup>377</sup> Godwin believed that 'Revolutions are the product of passion, not of sober and tranquil reason' and it is the latter quality which is fundamental to the achievement of his anarchist utopia.<sup>378</sup> However the abolition of government is achievable only on a very long time-scale, at a point in the future when 'Truth' has been allowed to 'pervade so considerable a portion of the community as to render them mature for a change of their common institutions'.<sup>379</sup> Until the arrival of that state of affairs, although Godwin despised hierarchical structures, he was totally opposed to their hasty removal. This stance underlies Armitage's statement that, 'I respect the established government of my country, and never disturb it', his claim that he would die, if necessary 'for a good

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., pp. 70, 74. Prefaces to the earlier editions of *Political Justice* are reprinted here.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., Book III, Chapter VII, p. 252.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., Book III, Chapter VII, p. 251.

king', and his view that the common objections made against nobility are 'puerile and inconsequent' (pp. 305-6).

Smith clearly distances Armitage, and, by implication, Godwin, from charges that men such as he were intent on overthrowing government in the way that had happened in France. As Gregory Claeys notes, by the late 1790s 'Atheists were now widely accused of having undermined the *ancien régime*'.<sup>380</sup> Kramnick writes that during this period, which saw a change in the public mood as a reaction to the violent events in France, Godwin's name was 'synonymous with licence, atheism and sin in traditionalist circles'.<sup>381</sup> Smith has these perceptions in mind when, unlike Godwin, Armitage denies publicly that he is an atheist, stating, 'I am not only not an atheist myself [...] I do not believe any man exists who will sincerely assert himself to be one' (p. 302). The effect of the removal of 'atheism' from Armitage's character is to suggest that Godwinian-inspired thinkers, and indeed Godwin himself, pose no threat to the well-being of society and supports Godwin's argument that 'philosophy' does not endanger social stability.

Armitage further reinforces his Godwinian credentials by stressing the importance of conscience, which 'till it is stifled, and at length destroyed by sophistry and falsehood', is common to every human being who has 'common sense' (p. 303). Armitage's remarks about sophistry and falsehood, together with the difficulty Mrs Crewkerne has dealing with 'integrity and truth', are reminders of one of the key doctrines of *Political Justice*, namely that 'truth is omnipotent'.<sup>382</sup> Truth, Godwin claimed, could work through individuals into the world at large and ultimately ensure that 'oppression, injustice, monarchy and vice will tumble into a common ruin'.<sup>383</sup>

<sup>380</sup> *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. by Claeys, vol. 1, p. xlix.

<sup>381</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, ed. by Kramnick, p. 13.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter V, p. 143.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, Book V, Chapter VIII, p. 462.

If Armitage is a Godwinian figure, so too is George Delmont, whose early education, directed by his mother, led him to 'reason on everything he learned, instead of seeing all objects, as they are represented, through the false medium of prejudice', in obvious agreement with Godwin's beliefs in the power of rational thought and the importance of truth (p. 34). A critic of existing society, he is described in his youth as moving from 'detestation against individuals, such as justices and overseers' to reflection on 'the laws that put it in their power thus to drive forth to nakedness and famine the wretched beings they were empowered to protect', a section which is reminiscent of Godwin's comments cited above.<sup>384</sup> Such reflections make him increasingly aware of 'the duties of mankind towards each other', a notion which is line with another key concept from *Political Justice*: 'duty is that mode of action on the part of the individual which constitutes the best possible application of his capacity to the general benefit' (pp. 23-4).<sup>385</sup>

Mrs Crewkerne bewails the fact that George's mother 'made him a *Philosopher*, it seems in baby clothes', remarking that 'he was never flogged out of' his opinions at Eton but had become a farmer, 'and determined to be nothing more' (p. 16). George's decision to reject a career in the law, church or military in favour of a life of farming is also in line with Godwin's principles, since it shows contempt for the usual expectations of the upper classes and for the paths to monetary and social success which such careers afford. It is in keeping with Godwin's vision in Book VIII of *Political Justice* of a land of individuals leading lives of frugal self-sufficiency, devoid of the need to be in a position of power or to acquire wealth. Thus George is said to be determined to 'yield his freedom to none of those motives which the love of power or wealth might hold out to him' (p. 35). As a farmer, he has no part in enforcing the injustices of a legal system

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<sup>384</sup> See above, p. 199.

<sup>385</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Book II, Chapter IV, p. 190.

which sends people to the gallows or in justifying or directing 'myriads to slaughter in the field' (p. 36).

The third of the triumvirate of 'philosophers', Glenmorris, the Scottish laird turned American farmer, shares some of the Godwinian principles displayed by Armitage and George. For example, he is described by Laura as displaying an 'abhorrence of falsehood, which he always disdained to use in the most apparently inconsequential matters, even such as related to the mere forms of the world' (p. 180). According to him, truth needs to prevail also in society at large, one of his major criticisms of English society being its concealment of its true nature. Thus, in an impassioned outburst to Armitage, he talks of the 'artificial polish, glaring but fallacious on one side, and on the other real and bitter wretchedness' which characterises society. He displays anger, in a similar way to both Armitage and George, at injustice and the grotesque cruelty of legal punishments. As if in the world of *Caleb Williams*, he describes with vehemence the shock he feels when he hears 'the cries of hawkers, informing who has been dragged to execution' and follows this with images of prisons -- 'the abodes of horror, where the malefactor groans in irons, the debtor languishes in despair' (p. 432). The three fictional 'philosophers', sharing as they do many of Godwin's concerns and beliefs, thus present a strong case for the values of freedom of thought and freedom of expression.

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It is clear that there are demonstrable general links to Godwin's philosophy in Smith's depiction of all three 'philosophers'. However, Smith is writing *The Young Philosopher* with much closer attention to the polemical discourse of the late eighteenth-century than critics have realised. For example, Garnai notes the importance of the Treason Trials

and the Gagging Acts to the production and circulation of Smith's 'later literary texts', but designates them as merely 'a kind of elusive yet ominous backdrop'.<sup>386</sup> By contrast, it is my contention that, far from being a shadowy presence hovering in the background, the Gagging Acts and the polemical radical response to them assume a major and central role in the narrative. Specifically, the novel is closely linked to Godwin's *Considerations* which was published in response to the two bills which were put before Parliament in November 1795, the first by Lord Grenville, the second by Pitt. These passed into law as the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act and the Seditious Meetings Act, commonly referred to as the Gagging Acts.<sup>387</sup> *Considerations* was written between 16 and 19 November and published on 21 November, 1795, during the period of parliamentary debate over the bills. In the pamphlet, Godwin makes close reference to the sentiments and actual words spoken in Parliament, some of which are also incorporated into Smith's novel.

In *Considerations* Godwin develops two major strands of argument, one of which warns against the dangers of extremist agitation and the other against excessive government curbs. In the pamphlet he employs the term 'philosophy' in the sense of exploratory and logical thought, a means of reaching truth by reasoning. It carries with it the connotation of calm non-assertiveness and therefore, according to Godwin, cannot threaten violent disorder, although the speaking and writing in which it is expressed is feared by the powerful members of a corrupt society who have much to lose from the seeking out of truth. Freedom of expression is an intrinsic part of 'philosophy' and can be of no danger to the stability of society.

Early in the pamphlet, Godwin acknowledges that there is a need to prevent a breakdown of public order in England of the kind which had occurred in France; however, he disagrees that this justifies the removal of a 'philosopher's' freedom to

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<sup>386</sup> Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s*, p. 7.

<sup>387</sup> For details of the bills, see Chapter 7, pp. 163-4.

state, in speech or writing, opinions with which the government is in disagreement and therefore categorises as seditious. He writes:

The great problem of political knowledge, is, how to preserve to mankind the advantages of freedom, together with an authority, strong enough to controul every daring violation of general security and peace. The prize of political wisdom is due to the man, who shall offer us the best comment upon that fundamental principal of civilization, Liberty without Licentiousness.<sup>388</sup>

There is a difference, he argues, between the type of inflammatory, Jacobin-style language and behaviour of the London Corresponding Society, and the cool interchange of political ideas. Later passages, in which Godwin develops the argument against the suppression of rational enquiry and debate, are of particular relevance to *The Young Philosopher*. He maintains that there should be no restrictions on the expression of ideas and that there is a distinction between those interested in social disruption and those who are genuine philosophers:

What men imagine they see in the way of argument, they can scarcely refrain from speaking, and they ought to be permitted to publish. [...] A doctrine opposite to the maxims of the existing government may be dangerous in the hands of agitators, but it cannot produce very fatal consequences in the hands of philosophers.

With these principles in mind, Godwin turns specifically to Grenville's bill:

Having here endeavoured to define the tendency of what Bishop Horsley calls 'common speculative and philosophical disquisitions', let us see whether they fall within the provisions of this bill, and what is the punishment adjudged against them. Under the seditious branch of the bill, we find these words: 'If any person or persons shall maliciously and advisedly, by writing, printing, preaching, or other speaking, express, publish, utter, or declare, any words, sentences, or other thing or things, to excite or stir up the people to hatred or dislike of the person of his majesty, his heirs or successors, or the established government and constitution of this realm, then he or they shall be liable to such punishment as may by law be inflicted in cases of high misdemeanours.' This clause needs no comment. Whatever were the intentions of the authors of the bill, into which perhaps it would be profane for us to enquire, nothing is more certain than

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<sup>388</sup> Godwin, *Considerations*, p. 125.

that the clause may easily be wrested to include 'common speculative and philosophical disquisitions'.<sup>389</sup>

Central to Godwin's argument is the distinction made here between 'agitators' and 'philosophers' and the belief that sound principles and people's safety can never be undermined by speaking, writing or reading 'philosophical' texts. However, the government has, according to Godwin, now reached the stage of wresting every 'speculative and philosophical' statement into the category of 'high misdemeanours' which lead to trial for treason. The phrase 'common speculative and philosophical disquisitions', identified as the words of Bishop Horsley, was used by Horsley in the debate on the Grenville bill in the House of Lords on 6 November 1795:

Common speculative and philosophical disquisitions, however, might be still written and published, though he always thought they did more harm than good; for the bill was merely directed against those idle and seditious public meetings for the discussion of the laws where the people were not competent to decide upon them. In fact, he did not know what the mass of the people in any country had to do with the laws but to obey them.<sup>390</sup>

In *The Young Philosopher*, Smith is influenced by Godwin's arguments, but there is evidence here that Smith moves beyond Godwin's own extrapolations and makes independent reference to what was said in the parliamentary debates and elsewhere. The inference is that she was making use of other printed material which reported the debates or she was incorporating discussions about them with Godwin himself or his supporters. Smith foregrounds the issue of whether discussing ideas and reading texts which challenge existing orthodoxy should be prohibited. She does this in two ways; firstly through passages of informal political discussion between various characters, discussions which, like the interchanges in *Desmond*, are skewed in favour of the radical line. Secondly, authorial description and comment also promote Godwin's arguments in favour of freedom of expression.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-1.

<sup>390</sup> *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, ed. by William Cobbett, 36 vols (London: T. C. Hansard, 1818), 32, columns 257-8.



As is the case with characters such as Newminster, Fordingbridge and D'Hauteville in *Desmond*, characters such as the ludicrous Mrs Crewkerne and Dr Winslow voice opinions which Smith eschews, in this case support for restrictions on reading and writing. Mrs Crewkerne is George Delmont's elderly aunt, a grasping and sanctimonious busybody who lives with the orphaned Delmont family at their estate of Upwood. A like-minded traditionalist is the wealthy clergyman, Dr Winslow. Burke is Mrs Crewkerne's 'idol' and she had 'once dined in company' with 'the most admirable Mr. B ---' (p. 66). Winslow has 'for all sort of prejudices' great respect and he 'loved "ancient opinions"; they saved him from the trouble of forming any new ones, and were the only opinions to live by' (p. 57). Smith contrasts these Burkeans, with their belief in the acceptance of established ideas based on wisdom acquired over time with the supporters of 'philosophers', for whom the consideration of new ideas is one of their defining characteristics.

Smith brings together Mrs Crewkerne and Dr Winslow in the second chapter and thereby introduces very early the question of the influence of reformist texts. She also shows even at this stage of the novel her close interaction with polemical discourse (pp. 13-20). Mrs Crewkerne holds forth about George's upbringing and the bad influence of his friends, particularly that of Armitage, who 'writes books -- very bad books'. She cites her father as an authority on the evil influence of such works:

My ever venerable and truly respectable father, the reverend Doctor Josiah Crewkerne, was accustomed to say, that the people in his time had not the true grace among them; and that their being suffered to read pamphlets and newspapers was a bad thing; for that they, being *ordained* only to work, and to live by the sweat of their brows, it was not fitting and right for them to look at matters above their sphere, and to comment on laws and on government. I remember it was a favourite maxim of his, and highly I honoured him, who lately repeated it, 'the people have nothing to do with the laws but to obey them'. (p. 18)

Both recent editors of the novel, Elizabeth Kraft and A.A. Markley, identify the source of Dr Crewkerne's quotation, namely Horsley's contributions to the debates on Grenville's bill. Markley simply quotes the words and identifies two occasions in the parliamentary debates when Horsley uttered them. Kraft also identifies the dates and quotes a lengthier extract from one of the speeches.<sup>391</sup> Neither editor comments on how Smith might have access to this knowledge, what might be its function in this section of the novel, and what might be the implications for her contemporary readers. When she has Mrs Crewkerne claim that her father was the ultimate source of Bishop Horsley's well-known comment, making a ludicrous connection between the reported words of a fictional character and the actual words of the parliamentary debate, Smith is drawing attention to the same speech upon which Godwin comments in *Considerations*, although he does not quote Horsley's remarks about the people's obligation to obey the law unthinkingly. By including a deliberate reminder of these words of the ultra-traditionalist Horsley, Smith is tapping into the contemporary political furore in which his remarks were certainly an ingredient. Horsley's remarks were chewed over on a number of occasions during the debates in parliament.<sup>392</sup> They were given wide notoriety by the Earl of Lauderdale, who is described in a report on the parliamentary debates as claiming that if 'he had been in Turkey, and had heard such a declaration from the mouth of a Mufti, he should have attributed it to his ignorance, the despotic government of his country, or to the bias of his religious opinions'; but that to hear it from 'a British prelate' filled him with 'wonder and astonishment'.<sup>393</sup> The result was the well-known depiction of Horsley as a mufti in a number of satirical publications.<sup>394</sup>

<sup>391</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, ed. by Elizabeth Kraft (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), p. 358; *The Young Philosopher*, ed. by A.A. Markley, p. 436.

<sup>392</sup> See, for example, *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 32, cols. 264, 266, 267, 268, 542.

<sup>393</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 32, col. 258.

<sup>394</sup> Robert Hole, 'Horsley, Samuel (1733-1806)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13820>> [accessed 19 Nov 2008].

The interaction between Mrs Crewkerne and Armitage, whom she has described as the writer of 'bad books', affords good examples of the interplay of novel, political pamphlet and parliamentary debate. Armitage is 'an author, who had ventured, though with great candour and liberality, to speculate on certain points which Mrs Crewkerne could not bear should ever be discussed at all' (p. 63). He had visited America twice and had also been in France. Mrs Crewkerne hates the fact that he had written in favour of Americans and claims that he had 'aided and abetted' the French Revolution, since he had been in France at the storming of the Bastille and applauded a famous speech by Mirabeau. Armitage had returned from France and had written a pamphlet:

While he exhorted the French people not to suffer themselves to be led by the first effervescence of liberty, into such licentiousness as would risk the loss of it, he hazarded a few opinions on the rights of nations, and the purposes of government, which though they had been written and spoken, and printed a thousand times under different forms, and were besides modified by the nicest attentions to the existing circumstances of his own country, and softened by a mildness and amenity of language, which was thought very considerably to weaken their effect, yet these high crimes and misdemeanors had estranged from him two or three old friends who held places, and several others who expected them (pp. 64-5).

The allusion to the phrase 'Liberty without Licentiousness', which was used by Godwin in the opening of *Considerations*, makes the links between the novel and the polemic overt and time-specific. It is also made clear that Armitage's pamphlet was not an incitement to revolution partly because of the way in which it was expressed. The use of language of a non-inflammatory kind is central to Godwin's defence of the right to free speech and to his argument that writing and reading does not *per se* bring about the disintegration of law and order. This is the basis of the attack made in *Considerations* on the London Corresponding Society, which had 'adopted the language' of the French Jacobins.<sup>395</sup> Moreover, Smith's ironic employment of the

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<sup>395</sup> Godwin, *Considerations*, p. 129.

phrase 'high crimes and misdemeanours' links the paragraph directly to Godwin's quotation of the wording of the Grenville bill.

Armitage is also said to have paid attention to the 'existing circumstances' of his country, a phrase which reappears elsewhere in the novel, in italicised form and upon which neither Kraft nor Markley make any comment. The phrase obviously carried a political freight which was apparent to Smith's contemporaries and which she deliberately employs with this in mind. For example, the expression is used in a conversation between George and Laura when the former talks about the values he shares with Glenmorris, focusing on the importance they attach to free speech (pp. 82-3). Laura comments on the experience of her husband in England:

There are instances [...] wherein, to use a phrase of the day, *existing circumstances*, to which submission is compelled, will not allow this entire freedom of action. [...] None have sacrificed more to obtain a perfect freedom of speaking, writing and acting; for that he has become an alien from his country, and has sought in another hemisphere the liberty which he could not exercise in his native island. (p. 83)

The phrase reappears in a description of Mrs Grinsted, a friend of Laura's mother, with whom Laura unwisely seeks refuge during her troubled wanderings in London:

Like Mrs Crewkerne, she held it to be perfectly justifiable to alter, change or falsify anything, if the *existing circumstances* required it -- a sophistry, in which she was countenanced by some of the greatest and most successful orators and statesmen of the present enlightened period. (p. 262)

It is clear that 'existing circumstances' was a buzz phrase in political discussion and referred to government justification for taking unprecedented or unconstitutional actions on the grounds of expediency. The expression was certainly used by Grenville when he introduced his bill to the Lords, to pre-empt criticism that it eroded legally protected liberties. Grenville claimed that other similar acts of parliament had been passed in earlier times when the circumstances made it necessary: 'In the present bill

there would be found no other variations from those acts, but such as existing circumstances rendered indispensably necessary'.<sup>396</sup>

The expression seems to have been taken up and used satirically by anti-government pamphleteers as a way of attacking what they perceived as unprincipled and cynical behaviour on the part of the government. For example, a pamphlet entitled *Existing Circumstances, the Watchword of Despotism* comments:

This principle, in the language of Robespierre, is *revolutionary spirit*; in that of Pitt, *existing circumstances*; in the language of the former, let every principle of justice and humanity be violated, but the Republic must be saved; in that of the latter, and his most determined supporters, perish commerce -- perish the constitution, but the hands of government must be strengthened.<sup>397</sup>

A later pamphlet, entitled *A Specimen of a New Dictionary Adapted to the 'Existing Circumstances'*, consists of mock dictionary entries. A typical entry is, 'Rational Liberty -- The suspension of the *Habeas Corpus Act*, the establishment of *spies*, secret examinations, &c'.<sup>398</sup> The list concentrates on government war policy, rather than the Gagging Acts, but it is clear that the expression was part of the common currency of anti-government opinion. Another pamphlet in which the sentiments are similar to those expressed in Smith's comments on Mrs Grinsted is the *Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt*, published in 1799. The author, William Drennan, refers to 'existing circumstances, of which in words and works you, Sir, are the chief, or at least ostensible author'. He goes on to comment that 'you have ever been the passive puppet of sessional expediency: the slave and suppliant of existing circumstances' and refers to 'the existing circumstances (beyond which boundary you were never known to stray)'.<sup>399</sup> Smith's use of the expression in the description of Armitage draws on a

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<sup>396</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 32, col. 246.

<sup>397</sup> Anon, *Existing Circumstances, the Watchword of Despotism!* (London: J. Smith, 1795), p. 25.

<sup>398</sup> Anon, *A Specimen of a New Dictionary Adapted to the 'Existing Circumstances'*, repr. in *The Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797* (London: printed for R. Phillips, 1798), pp. 189-90.

<sup>399</sup> William Drennan, *Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt* (Dublin: James Moore, 1799), pp. 4-5.

current of anti-government feeling while at the same time purporting to fit in with government thinking. She is ostensibly absolving Armitage from any accusation of stirring up trouble, since he pays the ‘nicest attentions’ to the difficult ‘existing circumstances’ of the country and, at the same time, satirising the notion that this can be used as a government justification for unacceptable action.

Another example of Smith’s close interaction with Godwin and contemporary political discourse is evident in her satirical portrait of Mrs Grinsted, the daughter of a baronet. Smith notes that the woman has ‘the most confirmed notions that title was the first, and fortune the second requisite for happiness’. Smith claims that this is the result of ‘the operations of such “salutary prejudices” on feeble minds’ (p. 231). In an editorial endnote, Markley suggests that the quoted phrase, “salutary prejudices” is ‘perhaps an allusion to Edmund Burke’s comments on prejudice’ and gives an extract from *Reflections* containing references to the single word ‘prejudice’ (p. 451). However, in his *Letter to A Member of the National Assembly* (1791), when he warns of the chaos which results from the rejection of traditional and hierarchical structures of families and society at large, Burke uses the adjective ‘salutary’ to qualify ‘prejudice’. He claims that when families ‘are no longer protected by decent pride, and salutary domestic prejudice, there is but one step to a frightful corruption’.<sup>400</sup> The phrase ‘salutary prejudices’ is also used in Godwin’s attack on Burke in *Political Justice*, in the chapter entitled ‘Of Political Imposture’.<sup>401</sup> Here Godwin considers the argument in favour of encouraging ‘prejudice’ as a way of governing the general population, namely that one class of men thinks and reasons for the other, which has to take its conclusions on trust. According to Godwin, anyone writing a book supporting this idea is seeking to lengthen the reign of

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<sup>400</sup> Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, p. 274.

<sup>401</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Book V, Chapter XV, pp. 493-505.

‘salutary prejudices’.<sup>402</sup> The phrase is placed in quotation marks by Godwin as well as Smith, suggesting that it is part of general political discourse.

The novel makes clear that reading and writing of whatever political or philosophical complexion are forces for good in society, encouraging virtue and the development of a ‘philosophical’ attitude which seeks to improve society in a rational and benevolent way. For example, reading, particularly forbidden reading, is a key part of George Delmont’s education and figures in the description of the attempts of Mr Jeans, his tutor at Eton, to censor what he read. George had become increasingly at odds with Jeans because of his ‘unfeeling apathy and systematic callousness’ towards his philanthropic behaviour. George gave money to poverty-stricken individuals, solicited help on their behalf and was developing a hatred of the social system which allowed grotesque injustice and suffering. The searching questions he asked about whether this was the best that could be done in a country which claimed to be the most perfect in the civilised world, and his attitude of ‘inconvenient philanthropy’ which Jeans had tried to impede, led George towards ‘books, whose first recommendation had been Jeans’s endeavours to prevent his reading them’ (p. 24). When he was in his final year at school he was able to access ‘modern works, which Mr Jeans had forbidden him ever to open at all’. Smith adds the comment that they were ‘purchased and read with attention, greater perhaps that he would have given them had they never been prohibited’, an argument which is arguably applicable not only to the particular circumstances of the later 1790s, but also to censorship at any period (p. 25).

The attitudes of the young George are strikingly similar to those of Godwin, in the period immediately following the outbreak of the French Revolution and before the writing of *Political Justice* (by which time Godwin was categorically condemning ‘tumult and violence’). Peter Marshall writes that initially ‘Godwin quietly watched

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p. 504.

political developments in France and at home. He hoped the French Revolution would trigger off a reform movement in Britain, and listened regularly to the debates in the House of Commons to see if there were any propitious signs'. Godwin's early views on the Revolution were well known because of his association with the Society for Commemorating the Glorious Revolution, and according to Marshall, Godwin retained to the end of his life a copy of the message of congratulation sent by the Society to the French National Assembly.<sup>403</sup>

The question of whether the *philosophes* and later radical writers were responsible for the Revolution and, by analogy, whether the work of modern 'philosophers' should be banned in England is addressed also in a discussion between the adult George and Dr Winslow, with the benevolent reasonableness of the former and the objectionable stupidity of the latter influencing the reader's opinion. Dr Winslow is very concerned because his niece has fallen in love with George, whom he describes as a 'pretended philosopher' who is keen to gain the fifty thousand pounds which she would bring to the match. George, he believes, would have no more scruple 'to possess himself of it, than his brother philosophers have done to overrun Europe' (p. 53). Winslow sees George unpacking some books which have arrived from London. Among them are some which 'the Doctor held in the greatest abhorrence from report only, for he had never read a line in them' and he begins 'a bitter invective against what he termed innovations in political, moral and religious concerns'. There follows a short debate between George and Dr Winslow in which George maintains that responsibility for 'crimes' cannot be attributed to 'philosophers', quoting from the work of 'one of them' -- Voltaire. To the more topical and specific question as to whether 'those who call themselves philosophers' have 'occasioned all the bloodshed and misery we have unhappily lived to see in our time, in a neighbouring kingdom', George adopts one well-known radical

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<sup>403</sup> Marshall, *William Godwin*, p. 78.



line, namely that they were trying to rid the world of 'superstition and tyranny', to 'emancipate the people from the fetters which crushed and galled them', and that the results were not the fault of the theorists, but of the old system. Tapping into the familiar Burkean image of the old regime, he argues that the collapse of its 'gloomy and absurd structures' means that both those who supported and those who opposed change were caught and crushed in the process. George concludes enthusiastically that 'the bastilles of falsehood, in which men's minds were imprisoned, are levelled with the earth, never, never to rise again' (pp. 53-4).

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The resolution of the novel, in which Glenmorris and Laura, George and Medora leave England for America, has been the focus of some attention from critics, who see this removal as representative of Smith's rejection of England. For example, *The Anti-Jacobin Review* complained that she 'continues to abuse England, and attempts to prove, as she cannot now say much for the happiness of France, that the only comfortable abode is America'.<sup>404</sup> This judgement has been echoed by some modern critics, among them Fletcher, who claims that the novel 'contains no hope for England'.<sup>405</sup> It is, of course, not only England which Glenmorris abandons, since Scotland also affords no refuge. Glenmorris had spent his early years there with his father, who was the head of a once illustrious clan, now shorn of its power. Glenmorris's education was, however, largely at Westminster School in London, where he learned to 'contemn the feudal power with which his father's prejudices had fed him' (p. 103). Rather than the Scotland which was a centre of the Enlightenment, the Scotland of *The Young Philosopher* is represented as the centre of superstition,

<sup>404</sup> *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, 1:2 (August, 1798), p. 187.

<sup>405</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography*, p. 280.

feudalism and Gothic cruelty, an antithesis to that world of philosophical enquiry as well as to the physical, intellectual and spiritual freedoms of America.

Critics have also examined at length the presentation of America in the novel. Keane, for example, argues that it is part of a 'discourse of national belonging' which begins with *Desmond* and is particularly dominant in *The Banished Man* and *The Young Philosopher*; the latter is one of Smith's 'dark romances about literal and metaphorical exile' in which she 'transforms displaced wanderers into cosmopolitan communities living in New World freeholds'.<sup>406</sup> Although Keane argues that for the group of exiles in the resolution of *The Banished Man* their small republic is 'fragile' and notes the 'signs of fracture' which haunt the endings of those of Smith's novels in which wanderers and exiles make up multi-national, expatriate communities, she maintains that America provides in *The Young Philosopher*, 'the most Utopian ending of any of Smith's novels'.<sup>407</sup> Critics differ in their estimation of the extent to which the American alternative is presented as an ideal to be sought and celebrated. Adriana Craciun argues for Smith's continuing development of a cosmopolitan ideal, claiming that *The Young Philosopher* presents 'an idealised American republic as the solution to Europe's corruption'.<sup>408</sup> Garnai, on the other hand, argues that critical attention has focused too little on 'the point of departure rather than the point of destination', and that America is a necessary refuge rather than a utopia.<sup>409</sup> The resolution cannot be seen as utopian, since it is overshadowed by the sufferings of Laura, which cannot be fully erased and which signify 'the irreversibility of social and political defeat'.<sup>410</sup>

<sup>406</sup> Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s*, pp. 106, 89.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 102.

<sup>408</sup> Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, p. 154.

<sup>409</sup> Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s*, p. 61.

<sup>410</sup> For further examination of Smith's representation of America as a utopian refuge see also Garnai, 'The Alien Act and Negative Cosmopolitanism', pp. 101-12; Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel*, pp. 168-9; Guest, *Suspicious Minds*, pp. 180-1; Leanne Maunu, 'Home is Where the Heart is': National Identity and Expatriation in Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher*, *European Romantic Review* 15 (2004), 51-71; Tarling, "'The Slight Skirmishing of a Novel Writer'", pp. 84-6.

It is true that there is plenty in the novel to suggest a country in need of root and branch reform and that physical removal from Britain to America is certainly presented as a politically attractive possibility. Indeed, as Claeys has argued, ‘tens of thousands of reformers’ had taken this route out of persecution during the second part of the decade’.<sup>411</sup> Perceptions of America as a place in which ideals of freedom and human rights had been put into practice also undermined loyalist claims that the French Revolution proved that such ideals were misguided and would inevitably lead to the breakdown of order. As Robin Jarvis argues, government attitudes to America were, during this period, ‘characterised by embarrassment’ at having ‘a democratic republic prospering across the Atlantic at the same time as ideological (as well as military) war was being waged against its Continental successors’.<sup>412</sup>

Smith promotes an anti-government view through Glenmorris, who has a persuasive vision of a different society which seems to be free, true to itself and without oppression. She builds the case for America from the account of his original arrival there; after a series of adventures, Glenmorris reaches America during the War of Independence. In the account of his meetings with Americans, Smith again connects contemporary politics with the seventeenth century, since Glenmorris gains the confidence of these people by identifying their struggle with that of the English Civil Wars, ‘that glorious cause for which *‘Hampden bled in the field and Sydney on the scaffold’*. The War of Independence is described as ‘the unnatural war they had been driven into’, thus removing it from any association of tumult and violence against an already established order, or aggression towards another country. Glenmorris describes Americans as ‘a new race of people’, who were ‘determined to be *free*, and were now making the noblest exertions to resist what they deemed oppression’. They treated him

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<sup>411</sup> *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. by Claeys, p. xlvii.

<sup>412</sup> Robin Jarvis, *The Romantic Period: the Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1789-1830* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2004), p. 33.

with kindness, because ‘the noble flame of liberty seemed to have purified their mind from every narrow and unmanly prejudice’ (p. 183). In the final chapter of the novel, Glenmorris lists the failings of English society, including the ‘luxury and wretchedness’, ‘injustice’ and what ‘we call society here, where at every step we take something appears to shock or disgust us’; there is no need for attachment to a particular nation, since ‘wherever a thinking man enjoys the most uninterrupted domestic felicity, that is his country’ (p. 432).

Although the case for America is made strongly and passionately by Glenmorris, it is arguable that the resolution of the novel is much more nuanced than has been suggested by critics. In this respect, it is similar to the resolution of *The Banished Man*, in which voices in favour of removal from England are to some extent counterbalanced by different opinions. Moreover not all the protagonists of *The Young Philosopher* leave England and for some that do, the removal is probably temporary. Particularly important is the role of Armitage, the virtuous Godwinian philosopher, who chooses, like Godwin himself, to remain in England, a decision which belies Craciun’s claim that Smith attempts to reconfigure ‘the condition of political exile’ as ‘the true basis for virtuous life’.<sup>413</sup> Glenmorris’s eulogising of America is interrupted by Armitage, who, although he had been to America twice and written in favour of the country, tries to persuade him not to leave England. Unlike Armitage ‘whose pleasures were solely dependent on literary gratifications’, Glenmorris claims that he has ‘the great book of nature’ open before him; returning to live in America does not mean that, as Armitage suggests, he will ‘abandon society’ and ‘starve’ his understanding (p. 431). The relationship between the two men is in some ways like that of Ellesmere and D’Alonville in *The Banished Man*, for although Armitage and Glenmorris are much nearer in politics, there is the same respect for difference. Thus Glenmorris decides not

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<sup>413</sup> Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, p. 158.

to talk about politics to Armitage, whom he places ‘among the moderates and quietists’, whose attitude is to ‘endure all things’ as well as ‘hope’ and ‘believe’ all things. He tells Armitage, ‘While you can be tolerably happy yourself, my dear friend, in this country, or believe that you can do good to its people, it is very fit you should stay’. However, for Glenmorris, this is not appropriate, since he is ‘not happy in it’ and he despairs of being ‘any use in promoting, beyond a very narrow circle indeed, the happiness of others’ (pp. 431-2). Their interaction therefore accommodates the recognition that removal to America is not the only way to deal with things as they are.

Indeed, of the three virtuous ‘philosophers’, it is only Glenmorris who chooses America because of lack of hope for England. Of George it is said that if he ‘had any wish left, it was to reconcile Mr and Mrs Glenmorris to England, and to engage them to fix their residence at Upwood’ (p. 430). It is Laura’s compromised state of health, both mental and physical, and her longing to leave the country where she has experienced the persecution and oppression of the poor, coupled with Glenmorris’s determination to return to America, that change his mind: ‘he had nothing but his local attachment to Upwood as a balance against his desire to gratify the parents of his wife’ (p. 432). Upwood has been rendered less attractive because his brother, who has now become Lord Castledanes, lives in vulgar splendour nearby. George’s ‘beloved sister’, Louisa, has married and will tenant Upwood, which leaves him free to go to America. However, this removal is described as a ‘temporary absence’, which George can now undertake without any immediate worry for his poor neighbours and immediate dependants (pp. 432-3). As is the case with Armitage, there is the implication that George has work to do in England. Moreover, as long as Armitage in the fictional and Godwin in the real world remain in England, at this stage in her political thinking Smith has not entirely despaired of England, or insisted that political exile is the only basis for virtuous life.

## Chapter Nine

### Political Despair: *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* (1800; 1802)

Although *The Young Philosopher* strongly promotes the case for the preservation of the liberty which ‘philosophy’ upholds and upon which it depends, like Godwin’s *Considerations* it can be read as a rear-guard action against reactionary forces. These forces ensured that by the time of the novel’s publication in 1798, and during the period when Smith was writing *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, three volumes of which were published in 1800 and two in 1802, most radical political voices had fallen silent.<sup>414</sup> This chapter explores the extent to which it is possible to detect the final years of Smith’s political conversation with Godwin in this complex, experimental and unfinished work, and considers whether her failure to bring the text to a resolution can be related to the failure of her political optimism.

The decline of British radicalism has been traced by Mark Philp, who describes the inexorable government propaganda and repression, which affected not only the popular societies, many of whose leaders were incarcerated or transported, but also the intellectual community of which the Godwin circle was an important part. As he notes, ‘A counter-radical culture blossomed within the arena which the radicals had formerly dominated’. This found strident voice in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, published between 1799 and 1821.<sup>415</sup> According to Gregory Claeys, there was a growing hostility to the ‘New Philosophy’, which was increasingly accorded the blame for the Revolution, in

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<sup>414</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Letters of A Solitary Wanderer* (Vols. I-III, 1800; Vols. IV-V; 1802), in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, vol. 11, ed. by David Lorne Macdonald. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are given in parentheses in the text.

<sup>415</sup> Philp, *Godwin’s Political Justice*, pp. 227, 221. For further accounts of the decline of radicalism and the Godwin circle, see: *Political Writings of the 1790s*, ed. by Claeys, pp. xlvii-li; Marshall, *William Godwin*, pp. 211-33.

contrast to earlier scapegoats such as ‘the character and social class of the revolutionaries’ or the oppression of the *ancien régime*.<sup>416</sup> Godwin himself became the target of sustained and virulent personal attack, the publication in January 1798 of his *Memoirs* of his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, adding fuel to the attack, with a wave of popular outrage at his account of her love affairs and two suicide attempts.<sup>417</sup>

Smith’s endorsement of Godwin in *The Young Philosopher* was therefore a stand against the popular tide of opinion. Indeed she drew attention to this in her Preface to the novel, written on 6 June 1798 in the wake of the reaction to his *Memoirs*, with her reference to Mary Wollstonecraft as ‘a Writer whose talents I greatly honoured and whose untimely death I deeply regret’.<sup>418</sup> Smith continued her association with Godwin until her death, throughout the period of his vilification, in a relationship which involved mutual authorial respect. For example, she wrote the Prologue to his disastrously unsuccessful play, *Antonio* (1800),<sup>419</sup> while Godwin noted in his diary his reading of *The Young Philosopher* in 1798 and *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* in 1800.<sup>420</sup> It was in this milieu, when the vibrant radical discourse which informed Smith’s earlier novels no longer existed, but in which she was one of Godwin’s supportive acquaintances, that her last prose work for adults, the incomplete *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, was written.

This work is a complex collection of tales which are more or less discrete, loosely linked by a framing narrative in the form of letters sent by the unnamed ‘Wanderer’ of the title. The Wanderer is a depressed misanthropist and misogynist, whose view of the world has been brought about by suffering, although it is not clear what caused his suffering. He describes himself as “‘A kind of Solitary Wanderer in the

<sup>416</sup> Claeys, ‘Introduction’, *Political Writings of the 1790s*, p. xlviii.

<sup>417</sup> For details of contemporary response to the *Memoirs*, see *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, by William Godwin, ed. by Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Peterborough, Ontario, Broadview Press, 2010), pp. 11-12; Marshall, *William Godwin*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>418</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, p. 3.

<sup>419</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Uncollected Poems* in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, p. 213.

<sup>420</sup> See ‘Texts Godwin Read’, in <<http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bibl>>[accessed 5 May, 2011].

wild of life, without any direction or fixed point of view; a gloomy gazer on the world to which I have little relation””, quoting from a letter written by Samuel Johnson concerning his reactions to the loss of his wife (p. 306).<sup>421</sup> Unlike Rousseau’s *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* (1782), which the title of Smith’s work inevitably and possibly intentionally brings to mind, this Wanderer’s distress is not alleviated by wandering alone in the natural world. Rather, it seems, his sense of loss will only be redeemed by interaction with the suffering of others.

In the course of his travels around Europe the Wanderer therefore relates, in letters to his friend Harry, the stories he hears. The five primary tales, corresponding to the five volumes, are set in a variety of time frames and locations, as is the framing narrative. In volume I the Wanderer is in Yorkshire in 1794 and relates ‘The Story of Edouarda’, which is set there in 1792. In volume II he is in Liverpool relating ‘The Story of Henrietta’, which is set mainly in Jamaica. In volume III, the Wanderer travels to France and tells ‘The Story of Corisande’ which is set in sixteenth-century France during the religious wars. In volume IV, he writes from Germany the tale entitled ‘The Hungarian’ and in volume V, in 1798, travels in sequence to England, Wales and Ireland to tell the story of ‘Leonora’. The work is further complicated by the use of several first-person narrators of the various tales which then themselves include further inset narratives spoken or written by other individuals.

Contemporary responses to this lengthy and complex work were unenthusiastic, with *The Critical Review*’s comments on the first three volumes angering Smith to such a degree that she rebutted some of the comments in her Preface to the fourth and fifth.<sup>422</sup> The reviewer damned the novel with faint praise, remarking that ‘while she has in no part in these volumes risen to her former excellence, she has not debased them by her

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<sup>421</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D* (London: Henry Baldwin, for Charles Dilly, 1791), p. 151.

<sup>422</sup> *The Critical Review* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. 32 (1801), pp. 35-42.



former errors'.<sup>423</sup> Such former errors included the employment of 'prudent ladies of a middle age, whose prototypes are not hard to find', the reviewer reiterating the common criticism of Smith that she used her novels as a means of self-propaganda. Smith takes up this point in her Preface, denying that she is guilty of 'foolish egotism' or that any such characters 'bear any relation' to her private life, apart from one character who 'suffers from the artifices of worthless men of a certain [legal] profession' (p. 310). She then suggests that the reviewer might once have served in this profession and widens the attack by suggesting that reviews are the 'vehicles of political animosity'.<sup>424</sup>

If contemporary critics were unenthusiastic, modern critics have paid scant attention to the work as a whole. This is partly because it is rather baffling in form, arguably not a novel at all, but rather a collection of tales or novellas loosely linked by an incomplete framing narrative. Loraine Fletcher for example, categorises the work variously as 'novellas' or 'romances'.<sup>425</sup> A.A. Markley, however, focusing on the multi-vocal nature of the work, suggests that it should be read as 'a new and exciting experiment in the form of the novel rather than a work of another genre altogether'.<sup>426</sup>

The work is tantalisingly incomplete, for although Smith acknowledges in her Preface to the fourth and fifth volumes that the tale of the Wanderer 'remains to be told', she never wrote the final volume which would have drawn the whole narrative together (p. 309). This has afforded the opportunity for suggestions as to her possible ultimate intentions for the work, a challenge taken up by David Lorne Macdonald in his editorial introduction to the work. He attempts to corral the complex narratives into a coherent whole by making a case for the structural integrity of the work on the grounds

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>424</sup> For further examination of contemporary reviews see: Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, pp. 293, 296; MacDonald, 'Introduction', *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, pp. xvii-ix.

<sup>425</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, pp. 290, 295-6.

<sup>426</sup> A.A. Markley, 'Charlotte Smith, the Godwin Circle, and the Proliferation of Speakers in *The Young Philosopher*', in *Charlotte Smith in British Romanticism*, ed. by Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), pp. 87-99, (p. 99).

that its form is akin to that of 'the greater Romantic lyric', in which the speaker of the poem 'begins in a state of alienation' but ends 'ready to greet the new day'. Similarly, he argues, the Wanderer begins in a state of solitude and alienation, but by volume V, after hearing and reading tales which illustrate the dangers of solitude, he is 'ready to rejoin humanity' and achieves 'reconciliation with nature'. Macdonald concludes this line of argument by suggesting that the Wanderer's narration might also have been intended to cure the uneasy state of mind of the recipient of the letters, but tellingly concedes 'we'll never know' (pp. xii-xvii).

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Of the discrete stories that make up these volumes, 'The Story of Henrietta', in the second volume, has attracted the most attention from those critics who approach the whole text in a piecemeal way; that is to say they select individual tales and link them thematically to Smith's earlier novels. Such critics compare Smith's attitude to slavery in this particular tale with that in *The Wanderings of Warwick*, as well as with novels by other writers and they also place it within the wider political discourse on slavery.<sup>427</sup> 'The Story of Henrietta' begins with the Wanderer's meeting with Denbigh, a former ward of the Wanderer's father, and Denbigh's wife Henrietta. After the Wanderer has described their meeting, Denbigh takes over the narration. His family wealth came from Jamaican plantations, but he was educated in England and engaged to marry Henrietta, the daughter of another estate-owner. She was summoned back to Jamaica by her father after her brother died. Because of various complicated plot machinations, although

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<sup>427</sup> See, for example: Adriana Craciun, "'Empire without End": Charlotte Smith at the Limits of Cosmopolitanism', *Women's Writing*, 16 (2009), 52-9; idem, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, pp. 173-4; George Boulukos, 'The Horror of Hybridity: Enlightenment, Anti-slavery and Racial Disgust in Charlotte Smith's *Story of Henrietta* (1800)', in *Essays and Studies: Slavery and the Cultures of Abolition*, gen. eds. Brycchan Carey and Peter J. Kitson, pp. 87-109; Markley, *Conversion and Reform in the British Novel in the 1790s*, pp 103-4; Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties*, pp.171-5.

Denbigh wanted to travel with her, he had to take a separate ship which was caught in a storm and then subjected to a privateer attack. Henrietta arrived in Jamaica six months before Denbigh, which meant that she had different adventures which take over at this point in the narrative.

Henrietta's narrative is written as if in letters to Denbigh, and describes her adventures in Jamaica, firstly at the mercy of her father, a cruel despot who fathered three children on his 'black and mulatto slaves' and who intended to marry her off to a different man of his own choice, whom she hated (p. 115). After a hurricane hit the area, she was escorted by Amponah, a black attendant, to the north of the island, at which point her narrative is interrupted by the resumption of Denbigh's.

His section of narrative tells of his being caught up in the insurgency of the Maroons, descendants of runaway slaves, which began on 12 August 1795. Michael Duffy has given details of the uprising, in particular that of the Trelawney Town Maroons. The members of this group, the largest of four Maroon colonies in Jamaica, who numbered about six hundred people, were in fear that they were about to be enslaved and 'took refuge in the mountains, ambushing search columns and raiding adjacent plantations which they burnt'.<sup>428</sup> Denbigh describes his capture by this group of Maroons, and his eventual rescue by George Maynard, a hermit.

Maynard, after taking over the narrative to tell his own life story, is ultimately revealed as Henrietta's uncle, the brother of her father. Earlier, when he was living in England, Maynard had read literature which opposed slavery and felt disgust at his own former indifference: 'I had looked on and been a party in oppression, from which all the sentiments of my heart revolted' (p. 182). He travelled to Jamaica, attempted to improve the conditions of the slaves on his own estate but was thwarted by the reactions of the

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<sup>428</sup> Michael Duffy, 'War, Revolution and the Crisis of the British Empire', in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. by Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 118-145, (p. 134).

other plantation owners, who saw him as a lunatic. Moreover, 'greater severities were often exercised on those in whose favour I had interfered, than if I had never pleaded for them the cause of humanity' (p. 182). He gave up what is presented as the impossible task of changing slave society and chose to live alone in a cave. For Maynard, the 'blindness' and 'ingratitude' of the 'polished Europeans' is more 'savage' than that of the Maroons (p. 185).

The whole story is concluded with the resumption of Henrietta's narrative. Amponah's rescue of Henrietta becomes a rape attempt from which she escapes only to fall into the hands of a group of Maroons, whom she regards with fear and disgust. Her deliverance is accomplished by Maynard, who is thus able to reunite the two lovers. In the final resolution, Denbigh has already 'divested himself, though at some loss' of all his Jamaican property. The emphasis is on this rather than the marital home of the couple, which will be in England, where Denbigh is 'looking out for the purchase of an estate' (p. 192).

Some critics, including Adriana Craciun, A.A. Markley and Charlotte Sussman, have drawn attention to the way in which Smith portrays slave owners as depraved oppressors and uses this paradigm as a trope for the oppression of women within marriage, thus engaging with two political issues: female rights and the abolition debate.<sup>429</sup> Henrietta says of her father, 'He has been used to purchase slaves, and feels no repugnance in selling his daughter to the most dreadful of all slavery' (p. 121). The ruthlessness of his treatment of Henrietta is paralleled by his treatment of Maroons and his own slaves and suggests that savage behaviour is not confined to the Maroons:

He is engaged, deeply engaged, in quelling those unhappy people whom they call Maroons, who have done him, I understand, considerable injury, and have now among them many of his runaway negroes; against whom, if they are taken, he meditates, I find, modes of revenge, which

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<sup>429</sup> Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, p. 173; Markley, *Conversion and Reform in the British Novel in the 1790s*, p. 104; Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties*, p. 172.

are really so horrible only to hear mentioned, that I am often under the necessity of leaving the room. (p. 116)

'The Story of Henrietta' includes criticism of slavery as an institution. Through the character of Maynard, in particular, Smith demonstrates her empathy with the victims of slavery's oppression, as well as showing her intellectual acceptance of the principles of social justice and individual freedom, views which ally her to the politically radical discourse of the period. However, Smith also has the heroine express physical disgust at individuals of African or part-African descent, including her three half-sisters, her father's daughters by 'his black and mulatto slaves':

Their odd manners, their love of finery, and curiosity about my clothes and ornaments, together with their own insensibility to their own situation, is, I own, very distressing to me. The youngest of them, who is a quadroon -- a mestizo -- I know not what -- is nearly as fair as I am; but she has the small eye, the prominent brow, and something particular in the form of the cheek, which is, I have understood, usual with the creoles even who have not any of the negro blood in their veins. As I am a native of this island, perhaps I have the same cast of countenance without being conscious of it, and I will be woman enough to acknowledge that the supposition is not flattering. (pp. 115-6)

Henrietta also describes a female Maroon, one of the two wives of the Maroon chief into whose camp she is taken after escaping from Amponah:

The negress was a heavy creature, her neck and arms ornamented with beads, strung seeds and pieces of mother of pearl; and though there was an affectation of European dress, she was half naked, and her frightful bosom loaded with finery was displayed most disgustingly. (p. 190)

It cannot be argued that Henrietta's attitudes are totally separate from those of the author, not least because Smith chooses to turn Amponah, the rescuer of Henrietta from the earthquake, into a would-be rapist. He has, it seems, controlled his savage sexual urges with difficulty until Henrietta is vulnerable and alone with him in the forest. Telling Henrietta, 'I *my* master and yours', at this point in the narrative he is equated with the oppressors and she with the oppressed (p. 188).

George Boulukos, in his excellent study of this work gives an extended analysis of 'The Story of Henrietta', describing it as 'the most complex treatment of plantation slavery in the late eighteenth century'. Smith's 'consideration of the possibility of fixing the problems of slavery through plantation reform is brief and discouraging'; amelioration is presented as impossible, not only because planters do not permit reform from within their own community, but also because of the 'depravity' of the slaves themselves.<sup>430</sup>

Throughout her career as a novelist, Smith drew on reports of events which she did not actually witness herself, using, for example the work of Helen Maria Williams and the accounts given by émigrés of events in France. In the case of her depiction of the Maroon uprising, as well as in her depiction of slaves and non-white Jamaicans in general, her knowledge is also limited. As far as the sources of her general information about the West Indies are concerned, one was the writing and indeed the acquaintanceship of Bryan Edwards, a well-known writer on West Indian history and society, whose work she recommends in *The Wanderings of Warwick*, as has been shown.<sup>431</sup> It has not been noted by modern critics that in 1796, Edwards published an account of the Maroon uprisings and in the same year spoke about the Maroons, in similar terms, in his maiden speech to Parliament.<sup>432</sup> Speaking in the Commons on 21 October 1796, he gave a 'short history of the Maroon negroes and the cause of the war between those people and the inhabitants of Jamaica'.<sup>433</sup> In this speech he quoted and agreed with a commentator from an earlier period that the Maroons are 'wild and lawless savages, who had no moral sense, and on whom neither persuasion nor

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<sup>430</sup> Boulukos, 'The Horror of Hybridity', p. 87.

<sup>431</sup> See above, Chapter 5, p. 116.

<sup>432</sup> Bryan Edwards, *Observations on the Character, Manners, and Habits of Life of the Maroons, and a Detail of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the Late War between these People and the White Inhabitants* (1796), repr. in Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (London: G. and W.B. Whittaker et alia, 1819), vol. I, appendix I, pp. 522-79.

<sup>433</sup> *The Parliamentary History of England*, ed. by Cobbett, vol. 32, col. 1225.

gentleness could make any impression'.<sup>434</sup> He continued by voicing his approval of the Jamaican Assembly's decision to transport the rebels to Nova Scotia on the grounds that they were 'unfit to remain on the island'. At this point in the debate, William Wilberforce intervened:

He could not help observing that while the Maroons had no representatives in that House, the planters had very able ones. It was now above a century since they were under our domination. He feared that proper care had not been taken to instruct them in the principles of the Christian religion; if they had, he had no doubt that long ere this they would have cast off that savageness which was imputed to them; for brutality was the effect of ignorance.<sup>435</sup>

After citing language difficulties as a reason for the impossibility of teaching them 'the principles of religion', Edwards continued:

He thought that whoever took it in hand he would have hard work to make Christians of them. They were so addicted to polygamy, that it would require the utmost exertion of human ingenuity to confine them to one woman. He was contented with one woman, but he was sure no Maroon was. [...] To his certain knowledge, the Maroons were cannibals. He was sure, if a clergyman was to be sent to them, instead of listening to his doctrines, they would eat him up.<sup>436</sup>

There is no reason to assume that Smith did not continue to have respect for Edwards, who was an eye-witness of the Maroon insurgency.<sup>437</sup> Indeed, in 1798 she wrote a letter to a publisher requesting to 'borrow Edwards or Long on Jamaica'.<sup>438</sup> The 'Long' referred to is Edward Long, a writer on slavery whom Kenneth Morgan describes thus: 'a strong pro-slavery advocate who regarded enslaved Africans as sub-human, an inferior species [...] he associated slaves with apes in terms of lechery and feared the prospect of slave revolts'.<sup>439</sup> Evidence of these views can be found in an extended section of Long's *History of Jamaica*, where the author describes slaves as

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid., col. 1226.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., cols. 1227-8.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., col. 1228.

<sup>437</sup> For details of Edwards's life see Richard B. Sheridan, 'Edwards, Bryan (1743-1800)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, January 2008.

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8531>> [accessed 12 May 2011].

<sup>438</sup> Letter of 3 January, 1798, to William Davies, in Smith, *Letters*, pp. 303-4.

<sup>439</sup> Kenneth Morgan, 'Long, Edward (1734-1813)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16964>> [accessed 18 May, 2011].

‘different species of the same genus’.<sup>440</sup> Long’s work influenced Edwards, who took material from the former’s book and put it into his own. For example, he says of a section of his own history of the Maroons, ‘The preceding Section consists chiefly of an extract from the History of Jamaica, by EDWARD LONG, Esq., published in 1774’.<sup>441</sup>

Views such as those articulated by Long in writing or by Edwards in both writing and in his Parliamentary speech would certainly not have afforded information which would have encouraged Smith to move from the equivocal stance towards slavery which she had already adopted in *The Wanderings of Warwick*. In ‘The Story of Henrietta’, although her radical politics help move her some distance from those expressed by Long and Edwards, her treatment of the issue continues to exhibit uneasiness and the sense of an unresolved philosophical and emotional conflict.

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Of critics who have considered the political import of *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* as a whole, Carrol Fry argues that it has ‘no systematically developed political theme’.<sup>442</sup> Fletcher claims that the stories are ‘interesting politically and historically’, although she does not examine their relationship to the political discourse of the time.<sup>443</sup> The most sustained commentaries on the political content of the work as a single unit are made by Amy Garnai, who addresses the work’s political content in two contexts; firstly, in an essay focusing on the story of ‘The Hungarian’ in volume IV and secondly in an analysis of Smith’s reactions to the politics of the late 1790s,

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<sup>440</sup> Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica: or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island: with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government*, 3 vols (London: printed for T. Lowndes, 1774), vol. II, p. 356.

<sup>441</sup> Bryan Edwards, *Observations*, p. 536.

<sup>442</sup> Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 134.

<sup>443</sup> Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith*, p. 296.



particularly as they are manifested in 'The Story of Edouarda', as well as in the tales as a whole.<sup>444</sup>

It is apposite at this point to describe briefly both tales upon which Garnai focuses. The story of 'The Hungarian' is introduced when the Wanderer is travelling in Germany and is stopped by three Hussars. One of them is Leopold, the son of a Hungarian nobleman, who tells him his story because he needs the help of an Englishman to reunite him with his wife Gertrude who is in England. Although the young couple had sought sanctuary there, under the terms of the Alien Act Leopold was designated a foreigner and deported. The intervening story of their meeting and marriage is set in a world in which belief in hereditary privilege is enforced in acts of despotic cruelty. The initial refusal of Leopold's father to let him marry the non-aristocratic Gertrude is eventually worn down, only to be replaced by the crueller authority of his older brother, Volgeth, who usurps his father's control of his own castle and places both him and Leopold in prison. Leopold finally escapes and is able to travel to England with Gertrude, to whom he is now married, only to be thwarted by his other brother, Altdorf, who has a post in the diplomatic service in England and reports Leopold to the authorities under the terms of the Alien Act.

'The Story of Edouarda' is set in Palsgrave Abbey, Yorkshire. Its owner, Sir Mordaunt Falconberg lives there with servants and two cruel and authoritarian Catholic priests who, motivated by greed, intend that he die without heirs. Sir Mordaunt had married a sixteen-year-old bride straight out of an Italian convent when he was in his early forties and it is assumed that his wife has died and is buried at Palsgrave Abbey. Of their three children, the oldest boy had died in young adulthood and the second son is also assumed to be dead. Their daughter Edouarda had been sent to a convent in Flanders but returned to England during the French invasion of the region in 1792 and it

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<sup>444</sup> Garnai, 'The Alien Act', pp.101-12; *Revolutionary Imaginings*, pp. 61-8.

is her return that puts the narrative into motion. She arrives hoping to see her father but is prevented from doing so by the priests. During her residence at Palsgrave she wanders about the house and grounds, meeting, at different times, three people who are central to the plot. The first is a young man, Hartingdon, who on the basis of this brief acquaintance, wishes to marry her. Secondly, Edouarda sees in the chapel a praying figure, later identified as her mother. The latter had been banished into total confinement within the house by her husband because she was alleged by the priests to have had an affair and given birth to her two younger children as a result. Thirdly, Edouarda meets her own younger brother Henry who had been placed firstly in the care of Italian peasants, from whom he was suddenly removed to spend the rest of his days in a monastery. He escaped and arrives at Palsgrave Abbey at more or less the same time as his sister. Later, he is killed trying unsuccessfully to save his mother from an insane attack by his father. Sir Mordaunt had been asked by Hartingdon for permission to see Edouarda and later, when he sees Henry next to her and his mother, he mistakes him for Hartingdon and so kills his son by mistake. Edouarda's mother dies of grief and shock, leaving Edouarda as the last survivor of her family, after her father dies choked by his own blood. Edouarda leaves England for good, lives in Switzerland and refuses ever to marry in case she passes on the strain of madness from her father's side of the family.

In her essay on 'The Hungarian', Garnai's focus is on what she terms 'negative cosmopolitanism'. She claims that in *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, as in *The Banished Man*, exile is less a matter of positive affirmation of the ideal of the citizen of the world, as has been mooted by critics such as Adriana Craciun, Angela Keane and Anne Mellor, and more a case of a movement away from 'despotism, intolerance and tyranny'.<sup>445</sup> In the case of 'The Story of Edouarda', Garnai refers more directly to the

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<sup>445</sup> Garnai, 'The Alien Act', p. 108.

immediate context of the writing of the whole novel, linking it to Smith's association with Godwin. She argues that Smith 'situates her political critique unequivocally on the radical side of the debate', albeit nervously in a time of government constraint.<sup>446</sup>

Garnai uses, as evidence of Smith's close association with Godwin, five recently discovered letters from Smith; four to Godwin and one to Godwin's second wife, Mary Jane Godwin.<sup>447</sup> Garnai gives specific attention to the letter to Godwin dated 1 September 1797, in which Smith asks him for help with finding a suitable house to rent for her daughter Lucy and Lucy's fiancé when they marry. Smith then tells him that she is reading *Political Justice* for the first time, and goes on to mention her son Charles, a soldier who had lost a leg in the siege of Dunkirk in 1793: 'My poor victim of our accursed systems is returned from Gibraltar. I am more miserable about him than I ever was; but there is little else but misery for me.' Smith refers then to her own recent illness before concluding with a reference to Lucy's future husband: 'The man for whose future establishment I have troubled you with this enquiry is a disciple of a better system & indeed there are few better Citoyens.'<sup>448</sup>

Garnai argues that these comments demonstrate Smith's employment of the vocabulary of political engagement and uses this textual evidence, as well as the historical facts of her meetings with Godwin and her reading of *Political Justice* at this time to support the general argument that Smith does not abandon her radical sympathies. She argues that Smith 'never abandons the hope for a better world' that the Revolution had failed to deliver.<sup>449</sup> Garnai links Smith's comments in the letter cited above to an observation made by the Wanderer when he introduces the tale of 'The Hungarian':

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<sup>446</sup> Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings*, p. 44.

<sup>447</sup> Pamela Clemit, 'Charlotte Smith to William and Mary Jane Godwin', pp. 29-40.

<sup>448</sup> Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings*, p. 45.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

To wish for peace, to desire that the waste of life may cease, and suffering humanity feel no longer the scourge of war, and its certain consequences, contagion and famine, is to be an Atheist, a Jacobin, I know not what! (p. 313)

Garnai claims that this ‘recalls’ Smith’s use of ‘the same vocabulary’ as that used in her letter to Godwin.<sup>450</sup>

Garnai’s assessments of the trope of exile in ‘The Hungarian’ and Smith’s political allegiances at this time as demonstrated in a letter are useful. However, I would argue that although the cited letters show Smith’s association with Godwin at this time, the passage from ‘The Hungarian’ does not have very strong and specific links to them. Moreover, although Garnai refers to Smith’s reading of *Political Justice*, she does not use *Political Justice* itself or indeed any polemical writing by Godwin in this period as touchstones to Smith’s political views. I argue that an additional, more substantial and more accurate examination of the nature of Smith’s political views when she was writing *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, and of the relationship between her views and those of Godwin, can be made using Godwin’s own polemical work, particularly work which is exactly contemporary with *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*. This evidence demonstrates that Smith’s stance has much in common with Godwin’s, but that whereas Godwin displays, even at the turn of the century, what Garnai terms ‘the hope for a better world’, such hope is not a feature of Smith’s final novel.

A key text which demonstrates Godwin’s political stance at this time is his *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr Parr’s Spital Sermon* (1801), in which he comments on the state of British radicalism. The text was written and published during the period of Smith’s composition of *Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, and coincided with attacks on his ideas and writing made by erstwhile friends and supporters as well as

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

political loyalists.<sup>451</sup> Smith had completed the first two volumes and was starting the next three by November 1800.<sup>452</sup> In April 1801 she wrote that despite a series of family disasters, 'I was compelled to finish the three volumes of "Letters of a Solitary Wanderer", which I had been two years about'.<sup>453</sup> This period was a difficult one for Godwin, particularly because of polemical attacks from friends. For example, between February and June 1799, his friend James Mackintosh had given a series of lectures attacking the New Philosophy, which he repeated in the spring of 1800. Godwin was finally galvanised into defending himself when his old friend, Dr Samuel Parr, who had connived with Mackintosh, attacked Godwin's philosophy in a sermon. Godwin responded to this sermon by publishing *Thoughts* in 1801.<sup>454</sup>

In this tract, Godwin acknowledges that the political climate has changed, so that now, 'the days of democratical declamation are no more; even the starving labourer in the alehouse is become a champion of aristocracy'.<sup>455</sup> However, he protests at what he considers his unjustified vilification:

No man, who, after having meditated upon philosophical subjects, gives the results of his reflections to the world, believes that, for having done so, he deserves to be treated like a highwayman or an assassin.<sup>456</sup>

For Godwin, the antagonism towards his person and his writing is symptomatic of a wider disaster. In a telling sentence he mourns the death of the hopes which had inspired a generation of radical thinkers: 'I have fallen (if I have fallen) in one common grave with the cause and love of liberty'.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Godwin, *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr Parr's Spital Sermon, Preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800: Being a Reply to the Attacks of Dr Parr, Mr Mackintosh, the Author of an Essay on Population, and Others* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1801), repr. in *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 6 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 2, ed. by Mark Philp, pp. 165-213.

<sup>452</sup> Letter of 23 November 1800 to the Duchess of Devonshire in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 361.

<sup>453</sup> Letter of 14 April 1801 to Joseph Cooper Walker in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 369.

<sup>454</sup> For further details of the polemical attacks on Godwin, see Marshall, *William Godwin*, pp.220-6.

<sup>455</sup> Godwin, *Thoughts*, p. 169.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

'The Hungarian' illustrates well the 'common grave of the cause and love of liberty' which is English society in the late 1790s and shows that Smith shares Godwin's dismay at the state of society. At the beginning of volume IV the Wanderer is travelling towards Vienna, through central Europe, much of which has been ravaged by the Revolutionary wars. He reflects on the destructive power of war and is reminded of the hostile attitude in England towards anyone 'who ever ventured to express an abhorrence of war'. It is at this point that he complains that anyone who wishes for peace is derided as 'an Atheist, a Jacobin, I know not what' (p. 313). The passage is a part echo of the interchange between Mrs Crewkerne and Armitage in *The Young Philosopher*. In this interchange, Mrs Crewkerne had accused Armitage of being 'an atheist, a deist, a free thinker [...] a Jacobin and a Republican'.<sup>458</sup> Smith's echoing of the comments is a reminder of the attacks on Godwin and his doomed attempts to protect the long-standing liberties enshrined in the constitution.

In 'The Hungarian', the connections to Godwin are apparent, when Leopold describes an education which centred upon the kind of reading which would have produced a philosopher of the Delmont, Armitage and Godwin kind and in which reverence for political 'liberty' was paramount:

The books we read together, were all such as taught me to idolise political liberty. He procured an Englishman to reside in the house, from the eleventh to the fifteenth year of my life. The works, therefore, of Sidney and of Milton, were as familiar to me, as those of the few French authors who have written on other principles than those upon which the government of their country was conducted. My excellent, my respectable father! you followed only your high ideas of the dignity and happiness of man, in thus instructing your son! Had his worldly interest, according to the usual acceptance of the world, been in your contemplation, you should rather have sent him to be a commis [clerk] in some of the superfluous offices of the most corrupt or despotic government that can be found in Europe. (p. 323)

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<sup>458</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, p. 302.

The choice of an English tutor is significant since it draws attention to the image of England as the cradle of liberty. Both *The Young Philosopher* and *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* represent England in this historical role, although by now the country is depicted as being in danger of seeing those liberties removed. Leopold then reflects on the effect of the reading and thinking which he did in the secluded Castle of Zolna, his ancestral home:

In such a seclusion, the young and active mind, forming itself almost entirely on books, raises around itself an ideal world of its own creation. (p. 324)

This is reminiscent of a comment made by Godwin in *Thoughts*: ‘The human imagination is capable of representing to itself a virtuous community, a little heaven on earth’.<sup>459</sup> Leopold is led to conclusions which are akin to Godwin’s belief in human perfectibility:

I supposed, that from the enlightened state of the world, the time could not be very distant, when fraud, oppression, and violence should cease; when governments should seek the interest and welfare of the people; and that, when reason had wholly removed the veil of superstitions, and every man found it his interest to act uprightly, the misery of which I read as the portion of the greater part of the human race, would be wholly at an end. (p. 324)

Such comments have close affinities to Godwin’s in *Political Justice* when he predicts:

There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice, as it is called, and no government. Beside this, there will be neither disease, anguish, melancholy, nor resentment. Every man will seek, with ineffable ardour, the good of all. Mind will be active and eager, yet never disappointed. Men will see the progressive advancement of virtue and good.<sup>460</sup>

Leopold then explains how this Godwinian vision of human perfectibility was then destroyed by his experience of and witnessing of despotic cruelty, ‘the cruel realities of life’ (p. 324). He does, however, hold for longer his hope in England, choosing it as the place to which he and Gertrude escape. As if to a shrine

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<sup>459</sup> Godwin, *Thoughts*, p. 207.

<sup>460</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, ed. by Kramnick, p. 777.

of freedom, they begin a 'pilgrimage' to England, 'the asylum of the unfortunate, the arbitress of nations, the seat of the liberal arts, and the chosen throne of liberty itself' (p. 382). This belief is destroyed when the Alien Act is invoked by his brother to remove him from England and separate him from Gertrude, Smith demonstrating the effects of one of the earlier pieces of legislation which eroded political liberty.

At the end of the tale Leopold approaches the Wanderer in the hope that he had found 'an Englishman who possessed all the honourable and generous feelings of his country, such as it was before the events which have aggravated national prejudices, and embittered even the noble and liberal minds of the well educated English' (pp. 396-7). However, the fact that his reunion with Gertrude is postponed until the next tale, engineered by the effort of the Wanderer rather than the workings of law, and that Switzerland rather than England is the refuge, separate Smith's political stance from that of Godwin. Despite the success of the Pitt government in silencing radical protest and thus ending the hope for change in England in the near future, and despite his reference to the 'grave of liberty', Godwin retains his faith that change will eventually come:

For myself I firmly believe that days of greater virtue and more ample justice will descend upon the earth; and in the meantime, I will not hold it for my consolation and luxury, fondly to imagine that the throne of ignorance and vice is placed on so firm a basis that it can never be removed.<sup>461</sup>

*The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* lacks even this restrained hope for the future, presenting instead a wide spectrum of human intolerance and cruelty which is relieved only by isolated acts of kindness and in which the few virtuous individuals seek refuge from the violence and oppression which is the norm no matter where or when their story takes place. In addition to the tales of Edouarda, Henrietta and Leopold in volumes I, II and IV, the remaining volumes also demonstrate these features.

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<sup>461</sup> Godwin, *Thoughts*, p. 206.



Volume III includes 'The Story of Corisande', set during the conflicts between Protestants and Catholics during the sixteenth century, a period of civil war which included the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres of 1572, when thousands of Huguenots were put to death in Paris and other French cities, and which more than rivalled the period of the Reign of Terror in atrocities. Whenever the opposing Calvinist and Catholic armies met, 'bloody and hard-fought battles ensued; while towns, adhering to one or the other party, were every day taken on one side or the other, and civil war in all its horrors, ravaged the distracted kingdom'. Smith also depicts the 'luxurious magnificence and refined debauchery' of the courts of both sides, in contrast to the lot of the 'insulted people' whose misery was forgotten. With obvious reference to Edmund Burke's *Reflections*, Smith remarks ironically that 'this was an age when *vice lost half its deformity by losing its grossness*' (p. 248).<sup>462</sup> Contrary to Burke's idealised version of the past, the reality was despotism and violence, the oppression of the weak by the powerful. Under intense pressure to renounce her Protestantism and to escape from an enforced marriage by her uncle to a man 'whom she had never seen, and whose name was till then unknown to her', the orphan Corisande sets out alone into a world of intrigue, danger and violence (p. 211). Her adventures and eventual marriage to the worthy Montgomeri are entangled with the historical events and persons of the period, including the Massacres, the political machinations of Catherine de Medici and the marriage of Marguerite de Valois to Henri de Navarre, the future King Henri IV.

Volume V is a sequel to volume IV, telling the story of Leonora, Gertrude's sister. The Wanderer decides to travel to Ireland, looking for Leonora on her behalf. Coincidentally meeting up with and informally adopting Leonora's son on the way, he rescues her from the violence of the 1798 Irish Rebellion and hears from her the story of her disastrous marriage to the unfaithful husband who has deserted her and her children.

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<sup>462</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.76. Burke claims that 'vice lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness'.

The account of this marriage includes the most overt piece of self-representation in Smith's novels, despite the criticisms directed at her by *The Critical Review*. In a mirror image of Smith's experience, Leonora's mother dies, her father remarries and, with the intention of improving her father's finances, Leonora is married off at fifteen to a man who turns out to be a worthless wastrel. There is no resolution to the tale other than the suggestion that Leonora and her family will join her sister in Switzerland and that the now admiring Wanderer with his 'unconquerable love of rambling' might not long remain 'on this side of the water.' His last words make it clear that he will not take his 'final resolution' until he once again meets the recipient of his letters (pp. 495-5).

The work as a whole gives this hopeful sign of the spiritual recovery of the Wanderer and has brought some, but not all the lover/protagonists to the hope of a future together. However, the cumulative impression of the series of tales is of a world in which institutional oppression is the norm, in the family, in the guise of religion and in the body politic. At the domestic level, personal liberty from patriarchal despotism is rarely attained and then only as the result of extreme acts of endurance and courage or because of the intervention of altruistic individuals. Autocratic and corrupt religious and political forces dominate the national sphere with images of war and violence running through all five tales. In England, the legal enshrinement of liberty of the individual which had been traditionally regarded as a pillar of the British constitution has been compromised, society moving into an age when even the wish for peace takes on political connotations and in which the refugee from oppression is the object of suspicion.

In a gloomy landscape of violence and displacement, reminiscent of the world of *The Banished Man*, a novel which is also permeated by Smith's political distress, the Wanderer is joined by the wandering protagonists of the stories and individuals whom they meet on their journeys, but this resolution of their wandering is not accompanied

by any sense of triumph, leaving at it does the world unchanged. Moreover, as in *The Banished Man* and in other, later novels, England is, at the least, a doubtful haven for the protagonists. Only in 'The Story of Henrietta' will it be the marital home for the protagonists. It is also notable that in this text, America no longer figures as an option for those in despair at the state of England and there is no positive endorsement of a set of political principles of the kind delivered by Glenmorris. In three of the tales Switzerland is offered as an uncelebrated and tentative retreat, in which, for example, Edouarda, 'endeavoured to endure a life, from which her early misfortunes had taken every hope of domestic happiness in the bosom of a family of her own' (p. 96). Smith had, in 1794, thought of setting up home in Switzerland as a way of removing herself from some of the financial difficulties of living in England, describing it as a place where 'I may have such enjoyment as peace can afford me & contemplate the fine scenes of Nature while I have mental & bodily strength to enjoy them'.<sup>463</sup> Switzerland in the tales does bring with it some Rousseauistic associations in that it is a place in which spiritual healing in the natural world might take place. However, there is no sense of the place as a cradle of revolutionary thought or of hope for the future of human society. Smith's perception of Switzerland in these stories has much in common with that of Helen Maria Williams in her account of a visit to the country. Williams talks of her eager anticipation of the restorative qualities of the landscape:

I am going to repose my wearied spirit on those sublime objects -- to sooth my desponding heart with the hope that the moral disorder I have witnesses shall be rectified, while I gaze on nature in all her admirable perfections.

Switzerland also offers her hope after the betrayal of Revolutionary ideals elsewhere since 'I shall no longer see liberty profaned and violated; here she smiles upon the hills,

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<sup>463</sup> Letter of 20 January, 1794, to Joseph Cooper Walker, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 97.

and decorates the vallies'.<sup>464</sup> However, although the landscape continues to fulfil her expectations, Williams realises that the country can no longer be seen as a representative of liberty and the hope of political change:

Such were my meditations when I first set my foot on the soil of Switzerland; the scenery of the country more than fulfilled the glowing promise of imagination. With respect to the character and manners of the people, a residence of several weeks at Basil somewhat chilled my enthusiasm: I had frequent opportunities of mixing in their societies, and discerned neither the love of the arts, of literature, of liberty, or of any earthly good, but money.<sup>465</sup>

It is significant that Smith was unable to complete *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, as if resolution had become impossible. Although it is tempting to assume that this was entirely because of her deteriorating health and her family problems, these factors did not prevent her from writing three works for children and the poem, *Beachy Head*.<sup>466</sup> Strangely, in view of her failure to complete *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, she began another novel, which, as Judith Stanton notes, has not survived. Smith wrote in a letter:

L'eau de jouvence and d'obli must be extremely refreshing. If I could obtain a little of it, I should be able to go on with a Novel, which I have begun since 1802, but which personal sickness or anxiety for those better worth being anxious about than myself have continually compelled to lay aside.<sup>467</sup>

Smith's withdrawal from the writing of *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* into a different work of the same genre is surely connected to the political despair of the work. As is the case with *The Banished Man*, Smith's political perturbation is reflected in the muted nature of resolutions in the individual tales; ultimately, however, this work

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<sup>464</sup> Helen Maria Williams, *A Tour in Switzerland: or, A View of the Present State of the Governments and Manners of Those Cantons, With Comparative Sketches of the Present State of Paris*, 2 vols (London: G. G. & J. Robinson, 1798), vol. 1, pp. 4-5.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>466</sup> Smith, *Conversations, Introducing Poetry; Chiefly on Subjects of Natural History, for the Use of Children and Young Persons* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804); *A History of England, from the Earliest Records, to the Peace of Amiens in a Series of Letters to a Young Lady at School*, vols. I and II (London: Richard Phillips, 1806); *A Natural History of Birds, Intended Chiefly for Young Persons* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1807); *Beachy Head: with Other Poems* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1807).

<sup>467</sup> Letter of 18 April 1804 to Sarah Rose, in Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 618.

reaches the point of no resolution. Although she clearly retains her admiration for Godwin and her belief in the need for the overthrow of despotic power in whatever context, such reform now seems impossible and unlike him she is not able to retain a faith in any future resurrection for society from the common grave of liberty.

## Conclusion

My study of Charlotte Smith's career as a novelist has added new and original material to current understanding of the literary and political landscapes of the 1790s. Close and detailed examination of all her novels in relation to contemporary political discourse has demonstrated that Smith made a distinct contribution to this discourse. Moreover, the extent and nature of her incorporation of politico-polemical material into her fictional narratives, which was unusual, innovative and probably unique in its period, justifies designation of her as a political novelist. Her use of such material is both sustained and wide-ranging and it is also evident that her political thought evolved and developed throughout the period, a process which is traceable in her novels. Her questioning and restless intelligence reacted to events in France and to the responses of other people to those events.<sup>468</sup> Such responses included those of the British government and polemicists of a wide range of political persuasion. Smith used the courtship novel to articulate her political vision much more seriously, extensively and pro-actively than has hitherto been realised by modern critics. Recognising and exploiting the possibilities for political revision which were already inherent in the courtship novel, she developed the genre into a political tool, although ostensibly it might have seemed an unlikely locus of political statement. In her hands, the courtship novel thus played a notable part in the 'protean' and dynamic radical political discourse which characterised the period.<sup>469</sup> Furthermore, her political engagements and interests drove her successive experiments and innovations in courtship fiction.

Smith engages with specific works of polemic from the first months of the French Revolution onwards and sustains this engagement throughout her novelistic career so that she is still responding to matters of national import and the work of

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<sup>468</sup> See Mark Philp, quoted above, p. 5.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

polemical writers even in her last novels. For example, the fourth volume of *Celestina* contains references to events of the early Revolution when they are first being reported in England. In this section of the novel Smith also draws upon Helen Maria Williams's polemical portrayal of the Revolution to promote her own politically radical response. Seven years later, in *The Young Philosopher*, Smith's attention is still engaged with matters political, namely the restrictions on freedom of speech and writing introduced by the Pitt government, and she incorporates ideas and quotations from polemical work by William Godwin to make the case for what she perceives as the preservation of liberty.

Smith's political material is drawn from a wide and politically varied range of sources. For example, she interacts with key polemical works of the period, including those written by Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams and William Godwin. In addition, she also makes use of other, now less well-known material, both written and spoken, such as reports of parliamentary debates, accounts of the death of Louis XVI and criticisms of the Pitt government made by radicals.

Over the course of the decade, Smith's political thought is constantly developing. Her evolving political vision is in dialogue with the changing political positions and oppositions of other thinkers and writers of the period and, like them, she responds to multi-various influences. These include the violence of the Reign of Terror, the execution of Louis XVI and the increasingly stringent legislation against radicalism introduced by the British government. Because her political vision is an evolutionary one, each novel demonstrates the shaping and conditioning of her radical opinions rather than the promotion of a fixed set of ideas.

To achieve successfully the incorporation of a political agenda into courtship fiction Smith uses contemporary political material in a variety of ways, exploiting her

material with subtlety and skill. One method is to turn sections of a narrative into a political debate; a second is to shadow a narrative with reminders of a particular aspect of political discourse; a third is to incorporate linguistic echoes of contemporary polemic.

In *Desmond*, *The Banished Man* and *The Young Philosopher* Smith makes the most substantial use of the fictional debate as a way of bringing her political concerns to the notice of her readers. She uses the courtship novel as a kind of forum in which questioning and examination of political views can take place. In *Desmond*, spoken and written discussions between Desmond and a variety of other individuals highlight some of the central political issues of the early 1790s. For example, extended discussions between Desmond and Bethel, as well as more cursory ones between Desmond and D'Hauteville, Newminster and Wallingford, reflect contemporary reactions to the anti-Revolutionary views expressed by Burke in *Reflections*. These discussions range from philosophical considerations of the nature of government as it was examined in the writings of John Locke and Sir Robert Filmer, to popular understandings and misunderstandings of the work of contemporary polemicists such as Burke and Paine. In this early novel, written at a time when Smith is enthusiastic and idealistic in her support for the social and legal changes which the French Revolution promised, she is able to promote a politically radical viewpoint by skewing the debate in favour of these changes.

In *The Banished Man*, Smith again incorporates debates which are concerned with political preoccupations of the day, in this case, the apparent betrayal of the ideals of the Revolution by the Reign of Terror, the imprisonment of the French royal family and the execution of Louis XVI. In this novel, within a narrative of filial obedience and treachery, Smith uses four young male characters, De Touranges, Ellesmere, Carlowitz and D'Alonville to ask whether the principles which informed the Revolution were



invalidated by its failure in France and whether there was now any way forward for those people who wished to bring about reform in England. The debates of the protagonists genuinely seek answers rather than acting as a means of promoting what Smith perceives as already proven truths, and they reflect her attempts and those of other radicals to come to terms with the horrors of the Reign of Terror. In this respect the novel is an excellent example of the way in which Smith's radicalism is constantly evolving in response to events and to the responses of other people.

In *The Young Philosopher*, political concerns are still dominant. Smith mounts a rearguard action against government repression of free speech and defends a political agenda which still envisioned the possibility of social and legal reform in England. Debates in this novel concentrate firstly on the need to preserve the right to indulge in 'philosophical' discussion and secondly on the future prospects of England as the upholder of liberty. For example, discussions between Armitage and Mrs Crewkerne make a strong case for 'philosophy' as an essential ingredient of a free and just society; those between Glenmorris and Armitage pose questions about England's future which are not fully resolved but which reflect the concerns of radical thinkers in the latter part of the decade.

A second method which Smith employs as a political novelist is to shadow a narrative with reminders of political discourse. Writing within the restraints imposed by government legislation which restricted freedom of speech, Smith uses this device with much greater sophistication and subtlety than has been appreciated or noted by modern critics. For example, Orlando's imagined chivalric world in *The Old Manor House* is a reminder of those contemporary political debates which centred upon Burke's lament for what he perceived as the overthrow of civilised and long-established codes of conduct in favour of a new and undesirable world order. However, Smith is also able to capitalise on contemporary interpretations and re-interpretations of the 'chivalric' figure

of Don Quixote, who could be viewed both as a figure of ridicule and opprobrium and as an object of admiration. In *Marchmont* she shadows the contemporary narrative with the history of the English Civil War, thus introducing an important polemical framework, instantly recognisable to her contemporaries, within which questions about the constitution and the right to freedom of expression had been posed and debated. For those radicals arrested and tried for treason, the Civil War period was of particular import, since some identified themselves with those tried and executed in the earlier period. Smith uses this shadowing with skill and sophistication, deliberately and frequently introducing this historical reminder of constitutional debates about the rights of individuals to remove a monarch, debates which in the period of the novel's composition were forbidden by law. I have argued that the technique is a form of encoded defiance of government restrictions on free speech and that Smith's use of the Civil War references is therefore an important political statement.

A further way in which Smith engages with contemporary political discourse is to incorporate the words of polemicists into the narrative in ways which would have been apparent to some of her contemporary readers. Although modern critics have noted the obvious quotations from polemic in *Desmond*, they have not fully explored the extent to which Smith echoes other polemical material later in the decade. The most notable examples of such echoes are to be found in *The Young Philosopher*, in which Smith quotes from work by Godwin, including *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable Practices and Unlawful Assemblies*, as well as drawing on other published and/or spoken political sources such as the proceedings in Parliament during the passing of the Gagging Acts in 1795. Smith uses these sources to align herself with Godwin in his continued opposition to government attempts to silence the voices of the 'philosophers' of the 1790s.

I have also shown that Smith's political sympathies had a major impact on her development as a novelist. Smith might have been content to produce money-making fiction of a conventional kind by following an already successful formula. Instead, this highly intelligent and politically-involved writer introduced elements which helped serve her criticisms of a society she perceived as unjust. These criticisms became politicised and focused as a result of her involvement with radical thinkers during the decade or so following the outbreak of the French Revolution. She inhabits with other female novelists of the period, such as Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft, the radical proto-feminist discourse which attacked dominant ideologies of female subordination within and outside marriage, and which connected this subordination to the injustices imposed by governments upon society as a whole. However, she does not confine herself simply to drawing parallels between the domestic and the public as a way of promoting a radical agenda. Instead, she also addresses matters which were debated in the public sphere, including constitutional matters such as the power relationship between monarchy and subjects and the rights of the individual to free speech.

Therefore, each of her post-1789 novels displays a political questioning of the existing state of England, both in terms of the constitution and in the workings of society and each is also, concomitantly, innovative and experimental in its form. The resolutions of courtship novels commonly ensured the heroine's ultimate safety within a patriarchal family, brought about by marriage to a man of rank and cushioned with the added security of inherited landed property. Smith experiments with each of these plot patterns and makes it clear in some Prefaces and within the narratives themselves that such conventional resolutions are part of a fictional world which belies the reality of a society in urgent need of reform. To a degree, the obvious disdain in which she held them can be attributed to her own experience of marriage and the injustice which male-dominated society inflicted upon her. But as I have demonstrated, political battles of the

1790s were also fought using these same topoi. The patriarchal family, in which women played a subservient role, and the inheritance of landed property were seen by conservatives as vital to the preservation of the security and prosperity of the country and as bastions against the destructive forces of reform. At a symbolic level the patriarchal family mirrored the relationship between monarch and subject and the inherited landed property the longevity and stability of constitution and state. Smith's political alignment is in conflict with those courtship novel conventions which endorsed the preservation of the old order. As she reacted to the French Revolution and to the political discourse in England which responded to it, she aligned herself with political reformists. Once this occurred, the safe resolutions of her earlier novels, in which marriage, patriarchal family and the inheritance of landed property were allowed to resolve the narrative despite the author's questioning of their validity, were further modified or jettisoned. Increasingly in Smith's novels, good marriage does not and need not depend upon parental agreement; patriarchal authority is frequently flawed or despotic; inherited landed estates no longer represent the continuity of traditional society, neither are they the peaceful refuge for virtuous protagonists.

Marriage, in Smith's two pre-Revolutionary novels, is a major feature in their resolutions, although even in these works, she is already introducing discordant elements by including the stories of Mrs Stafford, Lady Adelina Trelawny and Sophie Elphinstone. In *Celestina*, the inclusion of a less than perfect hero, Willoughby, also hints at the further undermining of marriage and the development of a radical critique of marriage in later work. After *Desmond*, marriages are no longer dominant ingredients of resolutions. Rather than being major celebratory events, they regularly occur before the ending, they create problems of varying degrees of severity for the protagonists, and they are subsidiary to other concerns of the novel. The critique of marriage is most fully

developed in *Montalbert*, as Smith becomes involved in a discourse which debated the validity of traditional assumptions about marriage and women's role within it.

In her treatment of the patriarchal family Smith also displays her characteristic questioning and challenging of unthinking acceptance of traditional belief. In contrast to Burke's apotheosis of the protective and wise father, Smith presents a large number of fathers and father-figures who range from the ineffectual, foolish, misguided or uninterested to the vicious, despotic or mad. In the former category are included Colonel Chesterville in *Ethelinde*, Mr Thorold in *Celestina*, Mr Somerive in *The Old Manor House*, and Armyn Marchmont's father in *Marchmont*. In the latter, larger category are the father of the older Rosalie and the surrogate father of the younger in *Montalbert*, the father and grandfather of Jessy Cathcart in *Celestina*, and the fathers of Edouarda and Henrietta in *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*. In *Celestina*, Smith overtly links the domestic to the national in the depiction of Bellegarde's father, whose despotic rule is paralleled with that of the French monarchy. However, the easy rejection of the rule of fathers in both the microcosm and the macrocosm is not reproduced in *The Banished Man*, in which Smith's consternation over the execution of Louis XVI is a dominating feature of the novel. Questions of fatherly authority and filial duty are now very emotive and complex because the frequently-made political parallel between monarch and father is brought into intense popular focus with Louis' death. Smith wrestles with the relationship between the grim outcome of the rejection of the authority of the father-king in France and the rejection of the authority of a father in the domestic family. However, although she is clearly appalled by regicide, this does not mean that she upholds the patriarchal ideal as the model for a better society. On the contrary, even in this novel, Ellesmere's father is presented as a counterbalance to the virtuous Viscount De Fayolles, and by the next, *Montalbert*, the model of the patriarchal family is once again under sustained attack in the family histories of the two Rosalies.

Even in her early novels, Smith uses inherited landed property both as the locus of social power which is passed by inheritance down a family line and as a symbol of the state and constitution. She challenges, firstly, the automatic inheritance of physical buildings and land, which bring wealth and social standing and, secondly, the allotment of power by an unreformed constitution to a minority of the population who have not earned that power through virtue. Thus in *Emmeline*, although Mowbray eventually passes by right of inheritance to the heroine, this is not until her proven worth has also entitled her to this ownership. In *Celestina* and *The Old Manor House* the narrative tests the protagonists; the story of who should inherit the estate attempts to explore the idea that virtue rather than rank, wealth or inherited right should one day inherit England. In *Desmond*, the only other novel in which the protagonists retire to an inherited estate in the resolution, the adherence to this convention sits uneasily in the context of the radical politics of the novel. Indeed throughout the narrative, there is a tension between the attempts to use, as heroes of a courtship novel, two hereditary owners of landed property with all the social and legal advantages which their status brings, and, at the same time, use them as spokesmen for radical change. Similarly, the landed properties of the novel are used to serve two contradictory functions. Firstly, they are used as political symbols of the English and French states and constitutions. The landed estate of Linwell represents English society as in need of change, that of D'Hauteville represents the failings of the *ancien régime*, and that of Montfleuri the virtues of the new France. Secondly, a landed estate is still used in the resolution according to a literary tradition of courtship novels as the retreat for the virtuous hero and heroine, a tradition which seems to reinforce the right to hereditary power of a small and privileged section of society.

In her other novels, in various ways, Smith ensures that the landed property is less of a focus and is increasingly absent from the resolution. Thus the protagonists of

*Ethelinde* are not ultimately located in Grasmere Abbey, despite its foregrounding in the narrative, and in *Marchmont*, even though Eastwoodleigh eventually becomes available, Armyn and Althea choose instead to live in a smaller property bequeathed by her aunt. In *The Wanderings of Warwick*, Warwick's and Isabella's residence in the house willed by General Tracy is a matter of passing reference at the beginning of the novel, and in 'The Story of Henrietta' in *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, Denbigh is merely intending to buy an estate in England. In the case of *Montalbert*, the retreat is to the small but beautiful house and estate bought by Ormsby for his daughter, a resolution which pays some lip-service to convention, but which is undermined by the critique of marriage and by the absence of Walsingham. In *The Young Philosopher*, *The Banished Man* and all but one of *The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer* there is no English landed estate offered as a prize, each of these narratives choosing to locate the married hero and heroine and a group of deserving friends emphatically outside England.

Drawing particularly on studies made by Mark Philp and Anne Mellor, I have maintained that during the 1790s the ways in which individuals might 'reflect' upon the French Revolution and 'contemplate' hopefully the possibility that English society might be reformed were manifold.<sup>470</sup> In writing this discourse extended, at its extremes, from the private and personal voices of diaries and letters through to public and polemical declarations in newspapers and political pamphlets. I have shown that throughout the period Smith opens up the possibilities of the courtship novel as a mode of political communication and that her ground-breaking and iconoclastic use of the genre ensured that it played a notable part in this political discourse. She exploits fully some of the common plot ingredients of the genre, which exposed the weaknesses of traditional patriarchal familial structures and patterns of inheritance, and thus gives the novels a wider political import, using them to influence readers' political opinions.

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<sup>470</sup> See Mark Philp and Anne Mellor, cited above, p. 2.

It is certainly the case that Smith uses the courtship novel to 'reflect' upon and 'contemplate' political concerns. *The Banished Man*, for example, is a work of questioning and reflection since it explores the moral and intellectual dilemmas which the execution of Louis XVI brought to British supporters of Revolutionary principles. However, I have also shown that Smith moves beyond the introspective, reflective and contemplative into the world of political engagement. Her courtship novels make incursions into territory which was commonly that of male-authored polemical writing, especially the political pamphlet. It is true that her opinions are for the most part encoded rather than stridently expressed and that the poly-vocal nature of novels means that other opinions and ideas are also voiced within her narratives. Nonetheless, like the works of polemic to which she responds, her courtship novels engage pro-actively in the most important political debates of the time. These debates argued the case for and against profound changes to society and the way in which it should be governed. During the early period of the French Revolution, the debates were principally concerned in England with the extent to which the existing hierarchical legal and social system with a monarch at its head should be modified. Later, debates centred upon the conflict between the government and radicals over freedom of expression, a conflict which dominated political discourse during the years of suppressive legislation.

*Desmond* is a contribution to the former debate, which was largely conducted in polemical writing in response to Burke's *Reflections*. Later in the decade and contributing to the latter debate, Smith demonstrates in *Marchmont* her attitude to the government's prosecution of radicals and the erosion of freedom of expression. In *The Young Philosopher* she enters even more directly and controversially into this major area of political dispute by supporting and interacting with Godwin's polemical attack on the government in *Considerations*. Words from his pamphlet are inserted seamlessly into the narrative, together with quotations from other contemporary political sources, a



technique which moves this novel well outside the expected parameters of courtship fiction into the world of public political debate.

Smith's courtship novels therefore occupy a significant place amongst the many 'shapes and languages of radicalism' of the period.<sup>471</sup> Her novelistic *oeuvre* as a whole is not only a fictional manifestation of her personal political odyssey but also a distinct contribution to the intellectual and political life of the time. Moreover, her intelligent, informed and questioning approach to politics aligns her with the 'philosophers' of her last complete novel. She was a seeker after truth with the intellect to engage with the politico-philosophical issues at the heart of the conflicts of the 1790s. Her vision had much in common with the sympathies of other politically radical writers, particularly Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Hays, who presented their ideas in a variety of genres, including political philosophy, pamphlets, novels and even travel writing. Smith's primary and distinctive choice was the courtship novel genre, in which she expressed her political convictions with sustained engagement, intelligence and complexity. She used the courtship novel to explore those matters which were debated in the real world of discussion and polemical interaction and had the skill to make, in her own words, every 'book of entertainment' into 'the vehicle of political discussion'.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> See above, Introduction, p. 13.

<sup>472</sup> Smith, *Desmond*, p. 4.

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